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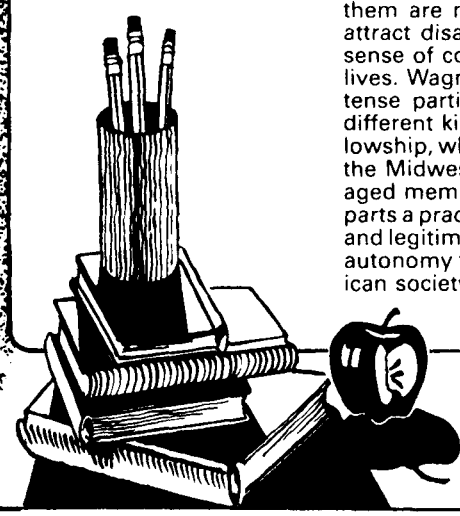

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CONTENTS

Aristides' Lifetime Reading Plan
Aristides 151

Cultural Literacy
E. D. Hirsch, Jr. 159

The Case for Mortality
Leon R. Kass 173

Watching the Pendulum in Education
Vermont Royster 193

Patterns of Fiction in Ancient Biography
Mary R. Lefkowitz 205

Perry Miller
Kenneth S. Lynn 221

Mark Pattison
Anthony Grafton 229

Out of the Swim with Barbara Pym
Isa Kapp 237

POETRY

Cry
Sandra Alcosser 170

Thermometer Wine
Robert Morgan 172

Letter Home
Lawrence Raab 192

Through Bifocals
Donald Davie 219

Slipping
Jane O. Wayne 228

Homage to Webern
Paul Breslin 242

BOOKS

Verbal Euthanasia
Ernest Gellner 243

Reviews
Reed Whittemore, Judah Goldin, Oscar Handlin, Doris L. Eder, Peter Shaw, James Kaufmann, Horace A. Porter 258

THE READER REPLIES 286

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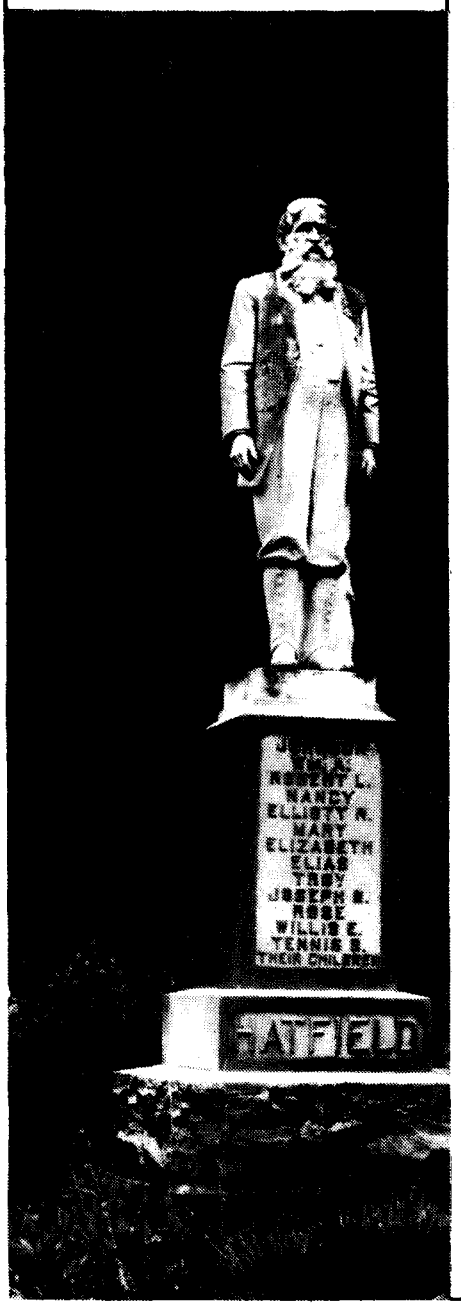
Paul Curry Steele



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Aristides' Lifetime Reading Plan

ARISTIDES

One day not long ago, over coffee, an earnest and likeable student about to graduate from the university where I teach allowed as how he would like to do a second draft on his education. There was so much he hadn't read, he said, so many enormous gaps in his education. To make up for all he had missed he was now going about asking people whom he thought well-read to make lists of books that he ought to read. I was pleased to have been asked. Being asked meant that this young student took me to be an educated man. Splendid. A little shallow learning lightly carried goes a long way, at least with the young; my genial pose seems to have worked yet again.

When someone asks you to make a list of books for him to read he is, whether he knows it or not, really asking, "How do I become an educated person?" Now that is a tricky question. It presupposes that one knows what an educated person looks like. While not for a moment claiming myself to be educated, I do think I have an inkling—perhaps a touch more than an inkling—of what this particular rare beast looks like. I say "rare" because, even though I travel in intellectual circles (are they called circles because so many of the people who travel in them usually end up back where they started?), I meet remarkably few people whom I consider educated.

I know a good many smart people, I know some highly intelligent people, I know a small number of people who know a vast amount about a few things, I am not sure I know anyone who is consistently wise, but I do know two beautifully educated men. I shall not go into semantical back flips about what constitutes an educated person. Of these two men I shall say merely that I think they are educated because they have read lots of books in lots of languages, and because they have kept their eyes open to the world around them, and because they have made lots of extremely interesting connections between books and the world. If one were to ask either of them to make a list of books for one to read, I cannot imagine them doing other than exclaiming, in a more refined way than I am now about to put it, "Whaddaya, kidding me?"

Yet my student was awaiting his list and, in his earnestness, was not to be put off. "Have you read the Greek philosophers?" I began, taking what seemed to me a safe road to start upon. "Plato, for example?" He answered that he hadn't, and here I inwardly sighed, recognizing that his university had let this young man down. I was luckier than he, for I had gone to a school—the University of Chicago in the middle 1950s—that had a firm idea of what the young should read, which was chiefly great writers. Aristotle and Plato were, in those days, most prominent among them. We also read Thucydides, Tacitus, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and Dostoyevsky; dribs of Marx and Freud and Max Weber; drabs of some contemporary writers, chiefly in the social sciences. If you weren't a clever student—and I wasn't, particularly—at eighteen or twenty years of age doubtless anywhere from 30 to 70 percent of what these great writers had to say sailed blithely over your head. Yet such reading did establish a few essential things: it taught you who the important writers are; it gave you some notion of what is important about them, which is chiefly the questions they deal with; and it lent you a certain animal confidence, so that you were never afraid of taking on the most serious of books. This, I have since come to think, was a great deal,

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and the best reason I have for sending the University of Chicago a modest annual alumni check.

Not that anyone could claim to be educated in four years, even at the most serious of schools, which the young man sitting across from me knew. Still, one had to start somewhere; and where, he wanted to know, ought he to start? An obvious answer would have been to tell him to read the Bible straight through—something I myself have never done—and then proceed to read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* back to back. Yet this advice, I felt, would only have depressed him; and contemplating it briefly, sound though it was as advice, I had to admit that it depressed me a little too. Instead I said, "You know, Jim, the main thing is to have some time-tested and officially great book going at all times—Gibbon, perhaps, or Cervantes—alongside which you can read less thumpingly significant books." Checking to see if I was following my own sensible advice, I recalled that I at least had bookmarks currently in Montaigne's *Essays* and Tocqueville's *Old Regime and the French Revolution*, though I hadn't read in either one for a good while. "As for the rest," I continued, "the important books will come to you when you need them. Or so in my life I have always found." Even as I said it I felt that this piece of what must have sounded like mystical wisdom did not go down too well, so I availed myself of the prerogative available to teachers through the centuries—I quickly changed the subject.

Yet I felt sympathetic to this young man and his hunger for a list, for anyone even moderately aware of the vast number of books in the world and of the quite pitiful dent any man or woman can hope to make in it is likely, as a first response, to cry out for help. Small wonder that people feel they require a list, a map, a guide to find their way. Smaller wonder that so many other people over the years have been ready to supply lists catering to this demand. In this century alone, to cite only those lists and collections of books that come to mind, there have been the Harvard Classics, the Great Books of the Western World, *The Lifetime Reading Plan*, *The List of Books* (edited by Frederic Raphael and Kenneth McLeish), and, most recently, a listing of nine thousand books in a book entitled *Good Books* (edited by Steven Gilbar, who also produced *The Book Book*). When it comes to books, it becomes clear, one could make a list of lists.

When I was my student's age, I thought of books less in connection with a list than in connection with a menu. Or, more precisely, I tended to view the world's books as set out on a buffet, and the educated person as one who could eat his way farthest along the table. Books were to be devoured, to be got under one's belt, so that one might in effect say, "Ah, the Kafka (the smoked salmon), I've already read (eaten) it." I recall that, shortly after leaving college, I packed a suitcase that included some sixteen volumes, paperback and clothbound, by Joseph Conrad, whose collected works I planned to read in the order in which they were written. As it turned out, I managed to get only as far as *Lord Jim* (Conrad's fourth book), in which I bogged down; and today, twenty-odd years later, I have yet to read all of Conrad, in or out of sequence, whose work I still admire. In fact, now that I think of it, I have not yet finished *Lord Jim*.

In my youth I had planned to read systematically through all the important writers—Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Dickens, George Eliot, Balzac, James, Mann, Proust, etc.—each in his or her full corpus. I would knock them off, one after another, and when I was finished there I would be—*voilà!*—an educated gent. It didn't quite work out that way, and I am able to stand here today and say that I have not read all the works of any of the above-mentioned writers, not to mention those of that prolific author Etc. I am embraced by shame, covered with the blush of my own inadequacy. When it comes to reading, though, nearly everyone feels, or ought to feel, inadequate in one way or another. For in one way or another, nearly everyone is inadequate. One simply cannot have read everything; if one tried to read most of the world's good books, there would be scarcely any time to read many of the world's interesting books, for, as any veteran reader will tell you, good and interesting books are sometimes but not always the same.

How much better just to relax in one's inadequacy, to enjoy it or, at any rate, to accept it. Yet this appears to be a difficult thing to do; it is difficult to admit one's own limitations to oneself and perhaps even more difficult to admit them to others. Among aca-

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demics and intellectuals, one of the most troublesome sentences to pronounce is, "I haven't read it." I have not myself actually lied by claiming to have read a book I have not in fact read, but I have stood by allowing others to think I have. To make amends, and to reform through public confession, I should now like everyone to know that I have never read *The Brothers Karamozov*.

This abject confession reminds me of a game I heard about not long ago, one supposedly played at academic parties. In this game, academics—one has to imagine them slightly fried—admit to the great books they ought to have but indeed have not read. I gather that the rhythm of the game is such that it begins with small admissions, but soon a competitive edge cuts in—a kind of one-downmanship—and the admissions get larger and larger. At a party of English department academics, for example, someone might begin by confessing that he has never read a novel by Norman Douglas. The next person might claim never to have read, say, *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table*. Someone then chimes in with the admission that she has never read the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins. "Hopkins hell," someone else says, "I've never read a poem by Yeats." Everyone agrees that this is fairly impressive, until a full professor says, "Yeats, Schmeats, I've never read the *Faerie Queene*." A sucking in of breath is heard round the room. Then a woman off in the corner, the department's resident Marxist, admits that not only has she never read Chaucer, but she isn't even certain of the century in which he lived. Suddenly a quiet man, the head of the school's American studies program, strides forth, obvious pride in his posture, to announce, "I hate to break up these festivities, but I'm afraid that's just what I'm about to do. You ready for this? I have never read a play by Shakespeare—and that includes your bloody *Hamlet*."

One of the reasons that most people feel inadequate about reading is the ideal—an ideal that is difficult to shake off—of well-roundedness. Being well-read generally implies being well-roundedly-read. Well-roundedness remains an ideal, even though taste and temperament make it an ideal impossible for almost all of us to achieve. Thus the other day I almost bought a ten-dollar paperback entitled *The Experience of Mathematics*. It looked to me a fascinating book—so fascinating that I nearly forgot that I barely have the mathematical concentration to do long division. I need to read a longish book on mathematics the way a couple living in a Manhattan high rise needs a Brahman bull; and I have about as much chance of making headway in such a book as that couple does of sneaking the Brahman bull past the doorman. Yet, as the old pop tune has it, I can dream, can't I?

Yet the dream of intellectual well-roundedness may be chimerical, well-roundedness itself being considerably overrated. I have neither read nor met a polymath whose mind seemed to me very interesting. Still, most of us cannot quite get over our amazement at people who can do more than one thing at a fairly high level. A scientist such as Lewis Thomas, for example, who not only can do cancer research but also can write splendid English prose and has actually read Montaigne, seems, in our day, an astonishing creature. It is comforting, though, to note that Montaigne himself neither was intellectually well-rounded nor sought to be. "I should certainly like to have a more perfect knowledge of things," he wrote in his essay "Of Books," "but I do not want to buy it as dear as it costs. . . . I seek in books only to give myself pleasure by honest amusement; or if I study, I seek only the learning that treats of the knowledge of myself and instructs me in how to die well and live well."

Montaigne did not ask that books make him learned—"In general I ask for books that make use of learning, not those that build it up"—but that they make him wiser, which is what one needs "to die well and live well." Montaigne might be Everyman, but not every man is Montaigne. What makes the problem of choosing reading for other people so difficult is that, as Montaigne himself puts it in the essay entitled "Of the Inequality That Is Between Us," there "are as many degrees in minds as there are fathoms from here to heaven, and as innumerable." To learn the degree of one's own mind, let alone that of the minds of others, is not so simple. It is chiefly because he knew his own mind so wondrously well that Montaigne, among other reasons, shall always be honored.

Because minds do so differ in degree, it can be a bit hopeless to instruct people about

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what they ought to read. I, for example, have discovered in myself a powerful feeling for fantastical literature—this feeling is one of powerful apathy. A decade or so ago many friends advised me to read J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, but it was no go. Neither have I ever wished to read William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. (Earlier I mentioned never having finished *Lord Jim*; is there a pattern emerging? Please make a note not to give me, on my next birthday, any books with the word Lord in the title.) The real is fantastical enough, and so I eschew fantastical books. Some quite intelligent people, similarly, have no taste for reading philosophy, and not only contemporary technical philosophy but philosophy of the kind Santayana and F. H. Bradley wrote. Others find nothing for themselves in even the most intelligible poetry. How many first-class physicists have had a serious interest in modern painting; and how many first-class modern painters have had a serious interest in physics? Would they have been better physicists and painters if they had? Or would they simply have gotten less physics and painting done?

One may be able to tell more about a person by what he doesn't read than by what he does. In *A Writer's Notebook*, Somerset Maugham offered an interesting catalogue of what he did not read, which included most modern novels, though he did read detective stories that he claimed he no sooner read than forgot. Maugham noted: "I have never cared to read books on subjects that were in no way my concern, and I still cannot bring myself to read books of entertainment or instruction about people or places that mean nothing to me. I do not want to know the history of Hungary or the manners and customs of the Eskimos, I do not want to read a life of Manzoni and my curiosity about stout Cortez is satisfied with the fact that he stood upon a peak in Darien." Maugham goes on to say that he can read "everything" that has to do with Dr. Johnson and "almost everything" about Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley. He also read "Plato, Aristotle (who they say is dry, but in whom if you have a sense of humor you can find quite a lot to amuse you), Plotinus, and Spinoza, with sundry modern philosophers, among them Bradley. . . ." Maugham felt that "old age robs one of the thrill one had when one first read the great masterpieces of the world," adding that this "one can never recapture." Yet he claimed that to read the philosophers and the Greek tragedians was "to sail with a gentle breeze in an inland sea studded with a thousand isles."

A most ungentle breeze—a small typhoon, really—on the subject of what and what not to read blew in some years ago in the form of a book entitled *Fifty Works of English and American Literature We Could Do Without* by Brigid Brophy, Michael Levey, and Charles Osborne. Sound advice on what not to read would be a boon to humankind, or so one might think. Every book one doesn't need to read, after all, represents one book more one will have time to read. Few negative pleasures are as exhilarating to the bookish as reading a persuasive review whose gravamen is that one needn't bother reading a prolific writer whose many works one has had a bad conscience about not hitherto having read. But the authors of *Fifty Works* aren't kidding around. Among the works they tell us they could do without—and, by implication, so ought we to do without them—are *Tom Jones*, *Moby-Dick*, *Leaves of Grass*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Pickwick Papers*, and, yes, that old game-ender, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Iconoclasm can be a fine thing; many an icon is worth shattering; but *Fifty Works* is an attempt to blow up the church. Reading down the list of classics condemned by the authors of *Fifty Works*, I can only report my personal conclusion that here three people's poison more often than not turns out to be another man's meat.

Behind the condemnation proceedings of *Fifty Works of English and American Literature We Could Do Without* is the charge that, in one way or another, these works are boring. I do not happen to agree, for example, that *Pickwick Papers* is boring. ("It does not develop," the authors write, "it simply goes on. And on.") But a question that arises is, How many boring books need to be read by a person seeking to become educated? I should guess that the figure might be between two and three hundred. Such a book for me was John Locke's *Two Treatises on Civil Government*, which as a young man I read somewhere in the middle of Texas. Time never hung so heavy as when I clumped my way through that work. I have thought since that, were I given a limited time to live, I might

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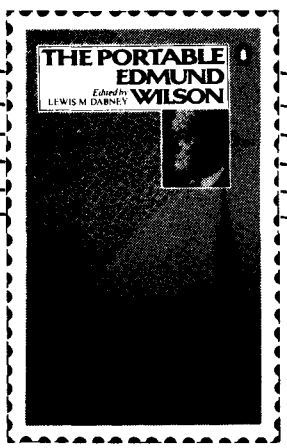

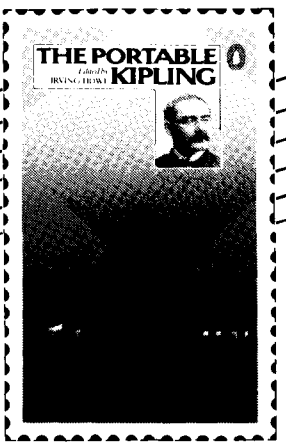

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return to Texas with the collected writings of John Locke. Under the Texas sun, with John Locke's text before me, each day would seem a decade.

Is it possible, though, that it is I and not John Locke who is boring? I don't think I care to answer that question, for I have noticed that people who are easily and therefore regularly bored are frequently themselves quite boring. What is boring and what is not boring is a question that puts one on tricky terrain. The ground often shifts with age. I have read many writers that, though they seemed to be dull when I was young, seem splendid in middle age (Matthew Arnold, for example). The reverse also sometimes obtains: books I adored when young I can barely read now that I am older. (When, a few years ago, I tried to reread Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, I found myself, so hokey did much of this once-loved book seem to me, counting the drinks its characters imbibed.) Interest, in bookish matters, is all very well, but it seems to me that it cannot be allowed to count for everything, especially among the young. A freshman student, in a course I teach in American novels, recently told me that, so interesting has he found Arthur Hailey's *Airport*, he has now read it four times. As I heard this, I winced and hung a flag with a star on the window of my heart for all that killed time.

Boredom, like beauty, is in the mind of the beholder. Still, I wonder if the student who asked me for a list of books would not be well-served with a category within that list entitled "Perhaps Boring But Doubtless Essential Books," on which an author such as John Locke might appear. So, too, might many a work by Marx, a number by Rousseau, and no few by John Dewey. A longer list would, of course, be one entitled "Doubtless Boring But Perhaps Inessential Books." But I forebear naming authors here. Once I began, once I really got into the swing of it, there might be no stopping me.

Unfortunately, giving people advice about what they ought to read invariably makes the person giving the advice sound stuffy. In his introduction to *The Lifetime Reading Plan* Clifton Fadiman, who is very well-read indeed and who can write well about books when he is criticizing or reviewing them, sounds the dread note of stuffiness when extolling the virtues of reading the most serious books: "They can be a major experience, a source of continuous internal growth. . . . Once part of you, they work in and on and with you until you die." He is talking about books, I know, yet what he is describing sounds curiously like fungus. Once you start talking about the delights of reading, funny things happen. Some years ago, discovering that a fairly bookish friend had never read any of the books of Isaac Bashevis Singer, I said to him, in what I thought was complete sincerity: "You're lucky, really. I envy you all the pleasures in store for you." He looked at me strangely. "You know," he said, "I never realized how damned condescending you can be when you put your mind to it."

Since that little exchange I have been chary of offering advice about books, except in print (when paid to do so) and except to the occasional student who asks for it. Not only is there the danger in doing so of sounding like a stuffed shirt, but in my case there is the additional danger of hypocrisy. When it comes to reading I am unable to follow any system whatsoever; the word desultory may have been invented to describe my reading habits. The phrase "full of fine but finally fickle intentions" would not be misapplied either. Thus on a recent Sunday I resolved to finish the last seventy or so pages of a book I had been reading in five- or ten-page snatches, Herbert R. Lottman's *The Left Bank*, a study of French literary intellectuals in the middle third of the current century. I didn't finish it, of course. Instead I began *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* by the Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa and *Goodbye to All That* by Robert Graves, a book I should have read before now but for one reason or another haven't. This, if I may say so, is a typical performance. I have only to declare that I shall finish a book to be certain of starting two others.

In reading, my personal hero is Justice Holmes. His literary diet was always so nicely balanced between the classic and the contemporary, and his reading for pleasure and for his profession seemed to feed into each other with only the blurriest line of demarcation between them. He took proper delight in a solid book, and he could be properly ticked off when a book didn't deliver the goods, such as a work in French on the right of privacy, of more than six hundred pages "and not a

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damned word from start to finish that I don't know or disbelieve." Taking a book's measure for him meant calibrating the mind of its author, an activity at which he was generally quite accurate; and his opinions about writers, never predictable, are always provocative. "I am a long way off," he wrote to Harold Laski, "from believing that Thoreau was a thinker in any important sense." He knew what he wanted from reading and where to go to get it. He cited, for example, the *Letters of Horace Walpole* as perfect for "the moments between vacuity and thinking." He sought from his reading what any sensible person ought to seek from reading. "I seek improvement," he wrote, "without excessive *ennui*."

In one of his letters Justice Holmes speaks of his inability *not* to finish reading a book once he has begun it—an inability that plagued him until his seventy-fifth year. Here is the one instance where I think of myself having the advantage over Justice Holmes. I learned not to finish books by the time I was forty. I do not, it is true, set out not to finish books but neatly accomplish this task all the same. I could put together an impressively long shelf of books with my bookmarks in them, which have had bookmarks in them for some time, and which in all likelihood will continue to have bookmarks in them. Many of these are books of the kind I think of as dippable—books not to be read straight through or even straight across but instead to be dipped into from time to time: collections of letters, books of stories or poems, an author's collected writings, diaries and journals, essays, an occasional ambitious novel begun in a fever of cultural ambition but put aside for more pressing business.

On the whole I seem to finish more novels than other kinds of books. Thus the Mario Vargas Llosa novel I mentioned a few paragraphs back has been read, but a bookmark now resides in the early pages of *Good-bye to All That*. My guess is that I may not say good-bye to *Good-bye to All That* for months and months. One of the especial pleasures of Anthony Powell's novel series, *A Dance to the Music of Time*, was that, once I had read three or four books in it, I found I could stop reading any of these novels almost in mid-sentence, then pick it up again three or four months later without the least sense of losing step. Mr. Powell's *Dance*, after all, is no boogaloo but something more on the order of a minuet. Again, I have been reading Abraham Joshua Heschel's book *Maimonides*, a work of fewer than three hundred pages, for nearly eight months now. It is not a difficult book, certainly nothing that needs to be swotted up; it is instead a book that gives pleasure, and I see no need to rip through it. I should just as soon be a man who is reading Abraham Joshua Heschel's *Maimonides* as a man who has read it.

But doubtless the oddest of all my current bookmarks is the one to be found on page 1048 of volume three of the new English translation of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. That bookmark has been advanced only ten or so pages over the past year. The final page of this, the final volume in what I believe to be the world's greatest modern novel, is 1107. I have read more than three thousand pages of this novel; I am within sixty pages of completing it; I have adored it; and yet something in me does not want me to finish it. Psychological interpretations of this most extraordinary behavior will be welcome and read with passionate interest, though I cannot promise to finish reading any of them.

Because of such erratic behavior I am all the more hesitant to give advice to others about what they ought to read. The intellectual world is, besides, much divided on this question. I happen to be someone greedy to read all the world's interesting books. But there are other views. The students of the great yeshivas of Eastern Europe spent lifetimes poring over a few basic texts. The disciples of the political philosopher Leo Strauss read and teach the same twenty or twenty-five books to the exclusion of almost all others. Vladimir Nabokov had a similar diet of twenty-five or so main books, which he read over and over, though these were of course very different books from those Leo Strauss chose to concentrate on. But Strauss, I think, would have agreed with Nabokov when the latter wrote: "Curiously enough, one cannot read a book: one can only reread it."

Rereading presents yet another immense complication. Every serious reader knows that he has read significant books at the wrong times in his life—usually when he was too young and hence not prepared for them—and would like to have another go at them. Then

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there are those books that gave one so much pleasure that one wishes to recapture the pleasure by the only known way—by, that is, rereading them. The late Alexander Gerschenkron, acting on this impulse, read *War and Peace*, as he wrote in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, "at least fifteen times." Yet when Somerset Maugham claimed that rereading masterworks did not give him the limitless delight one might expect, he blamed this in part on his own superior memory. Evelyn Waugh, on the other hand, writing to Anne Fleming, noted: "It is very pleasant losing one's memory. One can read old favorites with breathless curiosity."

Although theoretically I approve of rereading, I must confess that I have not done a great deal of it. The problem is my ardor to read at least once all the books I wish to read. What is more, I continue to buy books all the while: three books by F. H. Bradley; four of the five volumes of Osbert Sitwell's autobiography, *Left Hand, Right Hand!; The Letters of Gustave Flaubert; The Noël Coward Diaries*—in short, the usual mishmash. The likelihood of my finishing these books soon—or, possibly, ever—is not large, for I also have a good deal of reading to do in connection with my own writing and teaching. Yet I remain, like a man holding a quinella ticket at the racetrack, ever hopeful.

The hope is dampened a bit by age. There are so many things I already realize I shall never read in toto: Emerson's *Journals*, Sainte-Beuve's *Port-Royal*, Samuel Butler's *Notebooks*, Balzac's *La Comédie humaine*. There are so many things I should hate to think of not being able to reread: the novels of Tolstoy, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (if I can bring myself to finish it the first time). When does a bookish person decide it is time to begin rereading? The decision is no minor one. It is akin to deciding that perhaps one has swum out as far as one can and that one must now head back to the beach.

What complicates this even further is the almost continuous discovery of new writers—or, more precisely, older writers who are new to me. I had thought, for example, that I had read nearly all the interesting Yiddish fiction that had been published in English, and therefore had that subject—to revert to a phrase I used earlier—under my belt. Alas (or Hurrah?), in a book entitled *Rabbis and Wives* by Chaim Grade I recently discovered another master in this line. Worse (better?) news: Grade has a chunky oeuvre. I am currently reading his two-volume novel, running to nearly eight-hundred pages, *The Yeshiva*. Worse (better?) news still: it knocks me out. How many more hidden Chaim Grades—fine writers I ought to have known about but didn't—are out there?

Quite a few, my guess is. Barbara Pym, another such writer, in her novel *No Fond Return of Love*, has a character who, in response to the statement of another character who has been doing research on an obscure eighteenth-century poet, says: "You were lucky to find one so obscure that not even the Americans had 'done' him. . . . It's quite serious, this shortage of obscure poets." Yet this shortage has not yet reached alarming proportions, I dare say, and neither has the supply of good books from the past diminished. "Of making many books there is no end," it is written in Ecclesiastes, and the fellow who wrote that line, even though he did not subscribe to *Publishers Weekly*, knew whereof he spoke.

All this could only have thoroughly depressed my student, who came to me for a little sensible advice about what he ought to read, and who, if I had gone through this megillah with him, would only have departed with a headache. What I did tell him, finally, was to read no junky books, to haunt used-book stores, and to let one book lead him to another. And I tried to make clear to him that amusement, beauty, and, with a bit of luck, wisdom are picked up along the way in a reading life. But there is no systematic way to go about it, no list, no key to the kingdom of the educated. There is also a danger: once begun, there is no end. I myself would rather be well-read than dead, but I have a strong hunch about which will come first. Even that, though, is fair enough and fine with me. Meanwhile, if you hear of any good books, or writers whose works you think I ought to look into, I shall thank you, if you please, kindly to keep them to yourself.

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Cultural Literacy

E. D. HIRSCH, JR.

FOR THE PAST TWELVE YEARS I have been pursuing technical research in the teaching of reading and writing. I now wish to emerge from my closet to declare that technical research is not going to remedy the national decline in our literacy that is documented in the decline of verbal SAT scores. We already know enough about methodology to do a good job of teaching reading and writing. Of course we would profit from knowing still more about teaching methods, but better teaching techniques alone would produce only a marginal improvement in the literacy of our students. Raising their reading and writing levels will depend far less on our methods of instruction (there are many acceptable methods) than on the specific contents of our school curricula. Commonsensical as this proposition might seem to the man in the street, it is regarded as heresy by many (I hope by ever fewer) professional educators. The received and dominant view of educational specialists is that the specific materials of reading and writing instruction are interchangeable so long as they are "appropriate," and of "high quality."

But consider this historical fact. The national decline in our literacy has accompanied a decline in our use of common, nationwide materials in the subject most closely connected with literacy, "English." From the 1890s to 1900 we taught in English courses what amounted to a national core curriculum. As Arthur Applebee observes in his excellent book *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English*, the following texts were used in those days in more than 25 percent of our schools: *The Merchant of Venice, Julius Caesar,* "First Bunker Hill Oration," *The Sketch Book, Evangeline,* "The Vision of Sir Launfal," "Snow-Bound," *Macbeth,* "The Lady of the Lake," *Hamlet,* "The Deserted Village," Gray's "Elegy," "Thanatopsis," *As You Like It.* Other widely used works will strike a resonance in those who are over fifty: "The Courtship of Miles Standish," "Il Penseroso," *Paradise Lost,* "L'Allegro," "Lycidas," *Ivanhoe, David Copperfield, Silas Marner,* etc., etc. Then in 1901 the College Entrance Examination Board issued its first "uniform lists" of texts required to be known by students in applying to colleges. This core

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curriculum, though narrower, became even more widespread than the earlier canon. Lest anyone assume that I shall urge a return to those particular texts, let me at once deny it. By way of introducing my subject, I simply want to claim that the decline in our literacy and the decline in the commonly shared knowledge that we acquire in school are causally related facts. Why this should be so and what we might do about it are my twin subjects.

That a decline in our national level of literacy has occurred few will seriously doubt. The chief and decisive piece of evidence for it is the decline in verbal SAT scores among the white middle class. (This takes into account the still greater lowering of scores caused by an increased proportion of poor and minority students taking the tests.) Now scores on the verbal SAT show a high correlation with reading and writing skills that have been tested independently by other means. So, as a rough index to the literacy levels of our students, the verbal SAT is a reliable guide. That is unsurprising if we accept the point made by John Carroll and others that the verbal SAT is chiefly a vocabulary test, for no one is surprised by a correlation between a rich vocabulary and a high level of literacy. A rich vocabulary is not a purely technical or rote-learnable skill. Knowledge of words is an adjunct to knowledge of cultural realities signified by words, and to whole domains of experience to which words refer. Specific words go with specific knowledge. And when we begin to contemplate how to teach specific knowledge, we are led back inexorably to the contents of the school curriculum, whether or not those contents are linked, as they used to be, to specific texts.

From the start of our national life, the school curriculum has been an especially important formative element of our national culture. In the schools we not only tried to harmonize the various traditions of our parent cultures, we also wanted to strike out on our own within the dominant British heritage. Being rebellious children, we produced our own dictionary, and were destined, according to Melville, to produce our own Shakespeare. In this self-conscious job of culture making, the schools played a necessary role. That was especially true in the teaching of history and English, the two subjects central to culture making. In the nineteenth century we held national conferences on school curricula. We formed the College Board, which created the "uniform lists" already referred to. The dominant symbol for the role of the school was the symbol of the melting pot.

But from early times we have also resisted this narrow uniformity in our culture. The symbol of the melting pot was opposed by the symbol of the stew pot, where our national ingredients kept their individual characteristics and contributed to the flavor and vitality of the whole. That is the doctrine of pluralism. It has now become the dominant

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doctrine in our schools, especially in those subjects, English and history, that are closest to culture making. In math and science, by contrast, there is wide agreement about the contents of a common curriculum. But in English courses, diversity and pluralism now reign without challenge. I am persuaded that if we want to achieve a more literate culture than we now have, we shall need to restore the balance between these two equally American traditions of unity and diversity. We shall need to restore certain common contents to the humanistic side of the school curriculum. But before we can make much headway in that direction, we shall also need to modify the now-dominant educational principle that holds that any suitable materials of instruction can be used to teach the skills of reading and writing. I call this the doctrine of educational formalism.

The current curriculum guide to the study of English in the state of California is a remarkable document. In its several pages of advice to teachers I do not find the title of a single recommended work. Such "curricular guides" are produced on the theory that the actual contents of English courses are simply vehicles for inculcating formal skills, and that contents can be left to local choice. But wouldn't even a dyed-in-the-wool formalist concede that teachers might be saved time if some merely illustrative, non-compulsory titles were listed? Of course; but another doctrine, in alliance with formalism, conspires against even that concession to content—the doctrine of pluralism. An illustrative list put out by the state would imply official sanction of the cultural and ideological values expressed by the works on the list. The California Education Department is not in the business of imposing cultures and ideologies. Its business is to inculcate "skills" and "positive self-concepts," regardless of the students' cultural backgrounds. The contents of English should be left to local communities.

This is an attractive theory to educators in those places where spokesmen for minority cultures are especially vocal in their attack on the melting-pot idea. That concept, they say, is nothing but cultural imperialism (true), which submerges cultural identities (true) and gives minority children a sense of inferiority (often true). In recent years such attitudes have led to attacks on teaching school courses exclusively in standard English; in the bilingual movement (really a monolingual movement) it has led to attacks on an exclusive use of the English language for instruction. This kind of political pressure has encouraged a retreat to the extreme and untenable educational formalism reflected in the California curriculum guide.

What the current controversies have really demonstrated is a truth that is quite contrary to the spirit of neutrality implied by educational

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formalism. Literacy is not just a formal skill; it is also a political decision. The decision to *want* a literate society is a value-laden one that carries costs as well as advantages. English teachers by profession are committed to the ideology of literacy. They cannot successfully avoid the political implications of that ideology by hiding behind the skirts of methodology and research. Literacy implies specific contents as well as formal skills. Extreme formalism is misleading and evasive. But allow me to illustrate that point with some specific examples.

During most of the time that I was pursuing research in literacy I was, like others in the field, a confirmed formalist. In 1977 I came out with a book on the subject, *The Philosophy of Composition*, that was entirely formalistic in outlook. One of my arguments, for instance, was that the effectiveness of English prose as an instrument of communication gradually increased, after the invention of printing, through a trial-and-error process that slowly uncovered some of the psycholinguistic principles of efficient communication in prose. I suggested that freshmen could learn in a semester what earlier writers had taken centuries to achieve, if they were directly taught those underlying psycholinguistic principles. (With respect to certain formal structures of clauses, this idea still seems valid.) I predicted further that we could learn how to teach those formal principles still more effectively if we pursued appropriately controlled pedagogical research.

So intent was I upon this idea that I undertook some arduous research into one of the most important aspects of writing pedagogy—evaluation. After all, in order to decide upon the best methods of inculcating the skills of writing, it was essential to evaluate the results of using the different teaching methods. For that we needed non-arbitrary, reliable techniques for evaluating student writing. In my book I had made some suggestions about how we might do this, and those ideas seemed cogent enough to a National Endowment for the Humanities panel to get me a grant to go forward with the research. For about two years I was deeply engaged in this work. It was this detailed engagement with the realities of reading and writing under controlled conditions that caused me finally to abandon my formalistic assumptions. (Later I discovered that experimentation on a much bigger scale had brought Richard C. Anderson, the premier scholar in reading research, to similar conclusions.)

The experiments that changed my mind were, briefly, these: To get a non-arbitrary evaluation of writing, we decided to base our evaluations on actual audience effects. We devised a way of comparing the effects of well-written and badly written versions of the same paper. Our method was to pair off two large groups of readers (about a hundred in each group), each of which, when given the *same* piece of writing, would read

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it collectively with the same speed and comprehension. In other words, we matched the reading skills of these two large groups. Then, when one group was given a good version and the other given a degraded version, we measured the overall effect of these stylistic differences on speed and accuracy of comprehension. To our delight, we discovered that good style did make an appreciable difference, and that the degree of difference was replicable and predictable. So far so good. But what became very disconcerting about these results was that they came out properly only when the subjects of the papers were highly familiar to our audiences. When, later in the experiments, we introduced unfamiliar materials, the results were not only messy, they were "counterintuitive," the term of art for results that go against one's expectations. (Real scientists generally like to get counterintuitive results, but we were not altogether disinterested onlookers and were dismayed.) For what we discovered was that good writing makes very little difference when the subject is unfamiliar. We English teachers tend to believe that a good style is all the more helpful when the content is difficult, but it turns out that we are wrong. The reasons for this unexpected result are complex, and I will not pause to discuss them at length, since the important issues lie elsewhere.

Briefly, good style contributes little to our reading of unfamiliar material because we must continually backtrack to test out different hypotheses about what is being meant or referred to. Thus, a reader of a text about Grant and Lee who is unsure just who Grant and Lee are would have to get clues from later parts of the text, and then go back to re-read earlier parts in the light of surer conjectures. This trial-and-error backtracking with unfamiliar material is so much more time-consuming than the delays caused by a bad style alone that style begins to lose its importance as a factor in reading unfamiliar material. The contribution of style in such cases can no longer be measured with statistical confidence.

The significance of this result is, first of all, that one cannot, even in principle, base writing evaluations on audience effects—the only non-arbitrary principle that makes any sense. The reading skill of an audience is not a constant against which prose can be reliably measured. Audience reading skills vary unpredictably with the subject matter of the text. Although we were trying to measure our prose samples with the yardstick of paired audiences, the contrary had, in effect, occurred; our carefully contrived prose samples were measuring the background knowledge of our audiences. For instance, if the subject of a text was "Friendship," all audience pairs, everywhere we gave the trials, exhibited the same differentials. Also, for all audiences, if the subject was "Hegel's Metaphysics," the differential between good and bad writing

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tended to disappear. Also, so long as we used university audiences, a text on Grant and Lee gave the same sort of appropriate results as did a text on friendship. But for one community college audience (in, no less, Richmond, Virginia) "Grant and Lee" turned out to be as unfamiliar as "Hegel's Metaphysics"—a complacency-shattering result.

While the variability of reading skills within the same person was making itself disconcertingly known to me, I learned that similar variability was showing up in formal writing skills—and for the same reasons. Researchers at the City University of New York were finding that when a topic is unfamiliar, writing skill declines in all of its dimensions—including grammar and spelling—not to mention sentence structure, parallelism, unity, focus, and other skills taught in writing courses. One part of the explanation for such results is that we all have limited attention space, and cannot pay much heed to form when we are devoting a lot of our attention to unfamiliar content. But another part of the explanation is more interesting. Part of our skill in reading and in writing is skill not just with linguistic structures but with words. Words are not purely formal counters of language; they represent large underlying domains of content. Part of language skill is content skill. As Apeneck Sweeney profoundly observed: "I gotta use words when I talk to you."

When I therefore assert that reading and writing skills are content-bound, I mean also to make the corollary assertion that important aspects of reading and writing skills are *not* transferable. Of course some skills *are* carried over from task to task; we know that broad strategies of reading and writing can become second nature, and thereby facilitate literary skills at all levels. But the content-indifferent, how-to approach to literacy skills is enormously oversimplified. As my final example of this, I shall mention an ingenious experiment conducted by Richard C. Anderson and his colleagues at the University of Illinois. It, too, was an experiment with paired audiences and paired texts. The texts were two letters, each describing a wedding, each of similar length, word-familiarity, sentence complexity, and number of idea units. Each audience group was similarly paired according to age, educational level, marital status, sex, professional specialty, etc. Structurally speaking, the texts were similar and the audiences were similar. The crucial variables were these: one letter described a wedding in America, the other a wedding in India. One audience was American, the other Indian. Both audiences read both letters. The results were that the reading skills of the two groups—their speed and accuracy of comprehension—were very different in reading the two linguistically similar letters. The Americans read about an American wedding skillfully, accurately, and with good recall. They did poorly with the letter about the Indian wedding. The reverse

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was the case with the group of Indian readers. Anderson and his colleagues concluded that reading is not just a linguistic skill, but involves translinguistic knowledge beyond the abstract sense of words. They suggested that reading involves both "linguistic-schemata" (systems of expectation) and "content-schemata" as well. In short, the assumptions of educational formalism are incorrect.

Every writer is aware that the subtlety and complexity of what can be conveyed in writing depends on the amount of relevant tacit knowledge that can be assumed in readers. As psycholinguists have shown, the explicitly stated words on the page often represent the smaller part of the literary transaction. Some of this assumed knowledge involves such matters as generic conventions, that is, what to expect in a business letter, a technical report, a detective story, etc. An equally significant part of the assumed knowledge—often a more significant part—concerns tacit knowledge of the experiential realities embraced by the discourse. Not only have I gotta use words to talk to you, I gotta assume you know *something* about what I am saying. If I had to start from scratch, I couldn't start at all.

We adjust for this in the most casual talk. It has been shown that we always explain ourselves more fully to strangers than to intimates. But, when the strangers being addressed are some unknown collectivity to whom we are writing, how much shall we then need to to explain? This was one of the most difficult authorial problems that arose with the advent of printing and mass literacy. Later on, in the eighteenth century, Dr. Johnson confidently assumed he could predict the knowledge possessed by a personage whom he called "the common reader." Some such construct is a necessary fiction for every writer in every literate culture and subculture. Even a writer for an astrophysics journal must assume a "common reader" for the subculture being addressed. A newspaper writer must also assume a "common reader" but for a much bigger part of the culture, perhaps for the literate culture as a whole. In our own culture, Jefferson wanted to create a highly informed "common reader," and he must have assumed the real existence of such a personage when he said he would prefer newspapers without government to government without newspapers. But, without appropriate, tacitly shared background knowledge, people cannot understand newspapers. A certain extent of shared, canonical knowledge is inherently necessary to a literate democracy.

For this canonical information I have proposed the term "cultural literacy." It is the translinguistic knowledge on which linguistic literacy depends. You cannot have the one without the other. Teachers of foreign languages are aware of this interdependency between linguistic profi-

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ciency and translinguistic, cultural knowledge. To get very far in reading or writing French, a student must come to know facets of French culture quite different from his own. By the same token, American children learning to read and write English get instruction in aspects of their own national culture that are as foreign to them as French. National culture always has this "foreignness" with respect to family culture alone. School materials contain unfamiliar materials that promote the "acculturation" that is a universal part of growing up in any tribe or nation. Acculturation into a national literate culture might be defined as learning what the "common reader" of a newspaper in a literate culture could be expected to know. That would include knowledge of certain values (whether or not one accepted them), and knowledge of such things as (for example) the First Amendment, Grant and Lee, and DNA. In our own culture, what should these contents be? Surely our answer to that should partly define our school curriculum. Acculturation into a literate culture (the minimal aim of schooling; we should aim still higher) could be defined as the gaining of cultural literacy.

Such canonical knowledge could not be fixed once and for all. "Grant and Lee" could not have been part of it in 1840, or "DNA" in 1940. The canon changeth. And in our media-paced era, it might change from month to month—faster at the edges, more slowly at the center, and some of its contents would be connected to events beyond our control. But much of it is within our control and is part of our traditional task of culture making. One reassuring feature of our responsibilities as makers of culture is the implicit and automatic character of most canonical cultural knowledge; we get it through the pores. Another reassuring aspect is its vagueness. How much do I *really* have to know about DNA in order to comprehend a newspaper text directed to the common reader? Not much. Such vagueness in our background knowledge is a feature of cultural literacy that Hilary Putnam has analyzed brilliantly as "the division of linguistic labor." An immensely literate person, Putnam claims that he does not know the difference between a beech tree and an elm. Still, when reading those words he gets along acceptably well because he knows that under the division of linguistic labor somebody in the culture could supply more precise knowledge if it should be needed. Putnam's observation suggests that the school curriculum can be vague enough to leave plenty of room for local choice regarding what things shall be studied in detail, and what things shall be touched on just far enough to get us by. This vagueness in cultural literacy permits a reasonable compromise between lockstep, Napoleonic prescription of texts on the one side, and extreme laissez-faire pluralism on the other. Between these two extremes we have a national responsibility to take stock of the contents of schooling.

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Although I have argued that a literate society depends upon shared information, I have said little about what that information should be. That is chiefly a political question. Estimable cultures exist that are ignorant of Shakespeare and the First Amendment. Indeed, estimable cultures exist that are entirely ignorant of reading and writing. On the other hand, no culture exists that is ignorant of its own traditions. In a literate society, culture and cultural literacy are nearly synonymous terms. American culture, always large and heterogeneous, and increasingly lacking a common acculturative curriculum, is perhaps getting fragmented enough to lose its coherence as a culture. Television is perhaps our only national curriculum, despite the justified complaints against it as a partial cause of the literacy decline. My hunch is that this complaint is overstated. The decline in literacy skills, I have suggested, is mainly a result of cultural fragmentation. Within black culture, for instance, blacks are more literate than whites, a point that was demonstrated by Robert L. Williams, as I learned from a recent article on the SAT by Jay Amberg (THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Autumn 1982). The big political question that has to be decided first of all is whether we *want* a broadly literate culture that unites our cultural fragments enough to allow us to write to one another and read what our fellow citizens have written. Our traditional, Jeffersonian answer has been yes. But even if that political decision remains the dominant one, as I very much hope, we still face the much more difficult political decision of choosing the contents of cultural literacy.

The answer to this question is not going to be supplied by theoretical speculation and educational research. It will be worked out, if at all, by discussion, argument, and compromise. Professional educators have understandably avoided this political arena. Indeed, educators should *not* be left to decide so momentous an issue as the canonical contents of our culture. Within a democracy, educational technicians do not want and should not be awarded the function that Plato reserved for philosopher kings. But who is making such decisions at a national level? Nobody, I fear, because we are transfixed by the twin doctrines of pluralism and formalism.

Having made this technical point where I have some expertise, I must now leave any pretense of authority, except as a parent and citizen. The question of guidance for our national school curriculum is a political question on which I have only a citizen's opinion. For my own part, I wish we could have a National Board of Education on the pattern of the New York State Board of Regents—our most successful and admirable body for educational leadership. This imposing body of practical idealists is insulated by law from short-term demagogic pressures. It is a pluralistic group, too, with representation for minority as well as major-

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ity cultures. Its influence for good may be gauged by comparing the patterns of SAT scores in New York with those in California, two otherwise comparable states. To give just one example of the Regents' leadership in the field of writing, they have instituted a requirement that no New Yorker can receive a high school diploma before passing a statewide writing test that requires three types of prose composition.

Of course I am aware that the New York Regents have powers that no National Board in this country could possibly gain. But what a National Board could hope to achieve would be the respect of the country, a respect that could give it genuine influence over our schools. Such influence, based on leadership rather than compulsion, would be quite consistent with our federalist and pluralist principles. The Board, for instance, could present broad lists of suggested literary works for the different grades, lists broad enough to yield local freedom but also to yield a measure of commonality in our literary heritage. The teachers whom I know, while valuing their independence, are eager for intelligent guidance in such matters.

But I doubt that such a Curriculum Board would ever be established in this country. So strong is our suspicion of anything like a central "ministry of culture," that the Board is probably not a politically feasible idea. But perhaps a consortium of universities, or of national associations, or of foundations could make ongoing recommendations that arise from broadly based discussions of the national curriculum. In any case, we need leadership at the national level, and we need specific guidance.

It would be useful, for instance, to have guidance about the *words* that high school graduates ought to know—a lexicon of cultural literacy. I am thinking of a special sort of lexicon that would include not just ordinary dictionary words, but would also include proper names, important phrases, and conventions. Nobody likes word lists as objects of instruction; for one thing, they don't work. But I am not thinking of such a lexicon as an object of instruction. I am thinking of it rather as a guide to objects of instruction. Take the phrase "First Amendment," for instance. That is a lexical item that can hardly be used without bringing in a lot of associated information. Just what *are* the words and phrases that our school graduates should know? Right now, this seems to be decided by the makers of the SAT, which is, as I have mentioned, chiefly a vocabulary test. The educational technicians who choose the words that appear on the SAT are already the implicit makers of our national curriculum. Is then the Educational Testing Service our hidden National Board of Education? Does it sponsor our hidden national curriculum? If so, the ETS is rather to be praised than blamed. For if we wish to raise our national level of literacy, a hidden national curriculum is far better than no curriculum at all.

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Where does this leave us? What issues are raised? If I am right in my interpretation of the evidence—and I have seen no alternative interpretation in the literature—then we can only raise our reading and writing skills significantly by consciously redefining and extending our cultural literacy. And yet our current national effort in the schools is largely run on the premise that the best way to proceed is through a culturally neutral, skills-approach to reading and writing. But if skill in writing and in reading comes about chiefly through what I have termed cultural literacy, then radical consequences follow. These consequences are not merely educational but social and political in their scope—and that scope is vast. I shall not attempt to set out these consequences here, but it will be obvious that acting upon them would involve our dismantling and casting aside the leading educational assumptions of the past half century.

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Cry

SANDRA ALCOSSER

White legs and pink footpads, the black cat
loved me. It was summer, a perfect flush
of weeds and flowers. Mornings, he'd listen
for my kettle, the screen door snap, and he'd know
I'd come to breakfast in the asters. As I ate
my bowl of red berries, he'd burl and stretch
and claw about my hips.

One night as the cat and I watched the moon eclipse,
amidst the scuttling of bear and mice, there was a cry
from the forest, not seductive, but pained and wailing
like a siren. The next day the cat was gone. I'd heard
that even blackbirds broke veins in their throats
singing love songs. I stood by my window practicing,
trying to shape the feline song, to call him back.

My daughter was no different than a cat,
tapping the window glass over my bed,
crying at night till I rocked her frail ribs
against mine. Her hands on my breast,
dark curls sweated against her forehead,
tell me about the princess, she said, *the way*
she slept in a blue dress, waiting.

It was a month of heat storms, lightning scratched
across the valley like Sanskrit. A boy came riding
our footpath. He wore black jeans, a sliver of green
malachite at his neck. The breathless afternoon,

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the bees laid out on the red eyes of gaillardia.
Before she left, my daughter cut off her long hair
and bleached it yellow.

There were years I too turned from my mother's
cool white arms. First the pale boy, scarred
and silent, then my husband. We cleaned the ditches
together in spring, raking out the silt and dead branches.
He played a silver harmonica. A ringboned pony
was what I had when we ran away. A field of salsify
and a black skillet.

Stretched out on the porch this noon, resting
my swollen legs, I'm tired of canning tomatoes,
the house thick with red steam and basil.
The bite of salt and vinegar, cucumbers
floating like green bathers in brine.
All that flesh I've tended gone to pulp.
All that mismatched tenderness.

One weed knows another and each animal has its own cry
and when it's right, it's easy. Easy as my husband
behind me now, holding open the black screen door.
He's drinking tea with honey and a halo of gnats
screams about his face. *Let's sneak down to the basement,*
he says, *where it's cool and dark.* He cracks a bead of ice
in his teeth and offers half to me.

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Thermometer Wine

ROBERT MORGAN

Always hung on its plaque
on the porch like a mounted
icicle, but was so old
already the painted numbers
were peeling and hard to read.
Only Daddy could tell
the measurements—he'd known
the instrument since a boy.
At ten below it really
meant twenty, being slow
with age he said. At
ten above it was roughly
accurate, but on a hot day
he added twenty to its reading.
I watched the red needle
rise in the dog days and
marveled how the tiny
hair was both sensitive
and significant.
The blood rose in that stem
just a capillary of
bright, as though the day
were sipping through its ice
straw that special wine
and about to taste the
color from the drop at
the bottom that never clotted
or dulled no matter how
far up or down it wrote,
always chilled as snake or worm.

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The Case for Mortality

LEON R. KASS

WHY SHOULD WE DIE? Why should we, the flower of the living kingdom, lose our youthful bloom and go to seed? Why should we grow old in body and in mind, losing our various powers—first gradually, then altogether in death? Until now, the answer has been simple: We should because we must. Aging, decay, and death have been inevitable, as necessary for us as for other animals and plants, from whom we are distinguished in this matter only by our awareness of this necessity. We *know* that we are, as the poet says, like the leaves, the leaves that the wind scatters to the ground.

Recently, this necessity seems to have become something of a question, thanks to research into the phenomena of aging. Senescence, decay, and even our species-specific life span are now thought to be the result of biological processes that are, at least in part, genetically controlled, open to investigation, and in principle subject to human intervention and possible control. Slowing the processes of aging could yield powers to retard senescence, to preserve youthfulness, and to prolong life greatly, perhaps indefinitely. Should these powers become available, "Whether to wither and why?" will become questions of the utmost seriousness.

I think they should be serious questions even now, for several reasons. First, the project to control biological aging is already underway and is part of the mission of the new National Institute on Aging. Whether and how vigorously to pursue this project is thus already a matter of public policy and demands most thoughtful deliberation. Second, the consequences of any success in the campaign against aging are likely to be vast and far-reaching, affecting all our important social institutions and fundamental beliefs and practices. No other area of present biomedical research promises such profound alterations of our way of life, not to say of our condition.

But there is a more far-reaching reason for looking at the project to control aging, inasmuch as its objectives are, in many respects, continu-

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ous with the aspirations of modern medicine for longer life and better health. Indeed, prolongation of healthy and vigorous life—and ultimately, a victory over mortality—is perhaps the central goal and meaning of the modern scientific project, associated in its founding with men like Bacon and Descartes. Bacon it was who first called mankind to "the conquest of nature for the relief of man's estate," and there is ample suggestion in Bacon's writings that he regarded mortality itself as that part of man's estate from which he most needs relief. Bacon himself engaged in immortality research and may well have been its first martyr, sacrificing his life on the altar of longevity: he apparently contracted his fatal illness while performing freezing experiments on a chicken.

Descartes, in a famous passage in Part VI of the *Discourse on Method*, rejects the speculative philosophy of his predecessors in favor of a new practical philosophy that would "render ourselves as masters and possessors of nature." "This is not merely to be desired," he continues, "with a view to the invention of an infinity of arts and crafts which enable us to enjoy without any trouble the fruits of the earth and all the good things which are to be found there, but also principally because it brings about the preservation of health, which is without doubt the chief blessing and the foundation of all other blessings in this life." Descartes prophesied "that we could be free of an infinitude of maladies both of body and mind, and even also possibly of the infirmities of age, if we had sufficient knowledge of their causes, and of all the remedies with which nature has provided us."

Examining the campaign against aging might therefore shed some light on our entire scientific and technological project—its promise and its danger, its benefits and its costs. Thought about this future—albeit somewhat futuristic—prospect may along the way illuminate current practice and belief. At a minimum it will cause us to re-examine some of the basic assumptions on which we have been proceeding—for example, that everything possible should be done to make us healthier and more vigorous, that life should be prolonged and death postponed as long as possible, and that the ultimate goal of medical research is to help us live in health and vigor, indefinitely. Most important, we might become more thoughtful about the meaning of mortality and its implications for how to live.

I

But allow me first to set out some preliminary observations and assumptions.

1. By *aging*, I mean the biological processes, distinct from disease, that make the body progressively less able to maintain itself and to

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perform its various functions. Aging entails a gradual decline in vigor, a gradual degeneration of bodily parts and functions, an increasing susceptibility to disease, and an increasing likelihood of death. These changes are thought to be governed by a built-in "biological clock" or clocks, whose rate is species-specific and genetically determined.

2. By *life span,* I mean the biologically determined upper limit on longevity, different for different species, between ninety to one hundred years for human beings. This would be the life span of most of us in the absence of specific mortal diseases and fatal accidents. Thus, this specific age represents a "biological wall" against further increases in longevity by further improvements in medicine or our habits of life.

3. The biological clock and its midnight hour are probably linked; slowing of the rate of aging could very well lead to a longer life span. Most knowledgeable people agree that the rate of aging probably can be slowed, but how much slowing or lengthening of the life span is theoretically possible or technically feasible is anybody's guess.

4. The processes of aging are extremely complex and variable. Very little is known about their causes or about how to retard them. Still, the many theories that have been advanced now stimulate a growing amount of research. Other researchers believe that methods to slow aging can be discovered empirically, in advance of a full understanding of the causes. Such research is also currently being pursued.

5. The primary biological effects of age-slowing technologies could vary considerably—from increases in vigor with no gain in longevity, to a longer life span with all stages prolonged, to a longer life with a prolonged period of decline or with partial or uncoordinated increases in vigor (for example, stronger joints but weaker memory)—and cannot now be predicted. I shall here assume what is held to be the most attractive prospect, an increase in life span with parallel increases in vigor, for ten to twenty years, but perhaps longer. I shall also assume an anti-aging technology that is easy to administer, inexpensive, and not burdensome or distasteful to the users—that is, a technology that will be widely demanded and used.

All these observations and assumptions warrant critical examination of the evidence and much further discussion. (See, for example, *Assessing Biomedical Technologies: An Inquiry into the Nature of the Process,* chapter 4, "Retardation of Aging," The National Research Council-National Academy of Sciences, 1973.) Yet they suffice to provide a plausible and concrete basis from which to approach our more fundamental questions. And though one should not spend too much time deliberating about the impossible, one should not unduly encumber discussions of desirability with details of technique. Besides, it is ends, not means, that I wish to consider here.

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II

Aging research is pursued and supported by those who aspire to longer life for man, recognizing as they do that medicine's contributions to longevity have nearly reached their natural limit. As more fatal diseases and other causes of death are brought under control, more and more people are living out the natural human life span. But aging research is also pursued and encouraged by many more who hope that it will help to prevent or treat the infirmities, degenerations, and general loss of vigor that afflict the growing number of old people. These ailments are, in large part, the hitherto necessary price for the gift of longevity, a gift made possible by previous advances in hygiene, sanitation, medicine, and general living conditions. The benefits of success for individuals are obvious—who would not like to avoid or minimize for himself or his loved ones the burdens of weakness, immobility, memory loss, and progressive blindness, deafness, and dementia? These burdens to individuals are also costly for the society: there is loss of productivity and expensive medical and social services. By reducing these losses and these costs, the community, too, would presumably benefit from alleviating the handicaps and dependencies of the aged.

Yet this is but a narrow view of the social implications of retarding aging and contains a rather shrunken view of the old. The elderly are related to us not only as non-producing objects of care and expenditure. They are, it should go without saying, in the first instance human beings—now our ancestors, soon ourselves—most of whom do not think of themselves as belonging to a separated class, insultingly called "senior citizens." Especially as they are fit and able, they participate as individuals in the complex network of functions, institutions, customs, and rituals that bind us all together. Yet for some purposes it is useful to recognize what each of the age groups has in common and to notice as well the interdependence of these groups. It should then be clear that one cannot change the lot of one segment of the population without affecting the entire network of relations.

To begin with, if life were extended ten to twenty years, what would be the effects on the size and distribution of the population? The percentages and number of people over age sixty-five continues to increase: in 1900 they were 4 percent, today more than 11 percent of our population; in 1900, roughly 3 million, today, roughly 26 million. How would still further increases in these numbers and percentages, or the growing numbers of nonagenarians and centenarians, affect work opportunities, retirement plans, new hiring and promotion, social security, housing patterns, cultural and social attitudes and beliefs, the status of

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traditions, the rate and acceptability of social change, the structure of family life, relations between the generations, or the locus of rule and authority in government, business, and the professions? Clearly these are very complex issues, affected not only by changing demographic patterns, but also by social attitudes and practices relating these various matters to perceived stages of the life cycle, and also by our ability to anticipate and plan for, or at least to respond flexibly to, dislocations and strains. Still, even the most cursory examination of any of these matters suggests that the cumulative effect of the result of aggregated individual decisions for longer and more vigorous life could be highly disruptive and undesirable, even to the point that many individuals would be *sufficiently worse off* through most of their lives as to offset the benefits of better health afforded them near the end of life. Several people have in fact predicted that retardation of aging will present a classic instance of the Tragedy of the Commons, in which genuine and sought-for gains to individuals are nullified or worse, owing to the social consequences of granting them to everyone.

Let me illustrate with one example. Consider employment. How will the large numbers of seventy- and eighty- and ninety-year-olds occupy themselves? Less infirm, more vigorous, they will be less likely to accept being cut off from power, work, money, and a place in society, and it would seem, at first glance, to be even more reprehensible than it now is to push them out of the way. New opportunities and patterns for work or leisure would appear to be needed. Mandatory retirement could be delayed, permitting the old to remain active and permitting society to gain from the continued use of their accumulated skills. But what about the numerous tedious, unrewarding, or degrading jobs? Would delaying retirement be desirable or attractive? Also, would not delayed retirement clog the promotional ladders and block opportunities for young people just starting out, raising obstacles to the ambitions and hopes of all—save for longer job security for those who have made it aboard?

The planned undertaking of second and third careers could provide alternatives to later retirement, but with few exceptions such opportunities would require re-education during mid-career, especially now that knowledge and skills needed for work are increasingly sophisticated and require more and more specialized education. These same educational requirements render difficult the development of new and rewarding uses of post-retirement leisure, and it is far from clear that leisure is most fruitfully used when stacked up at the end of a life in which work is regarded as the main source of dignity. And, in any case, if the old are to be at leisure, the middle-aged will have to pay—a task they are unlikely to want to undertake, strapped as they are by the mounting costs of

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caring for their young. A basic question we are already struggling with, and not very well, is how to accommodate our growing elderly population in a society whose young people are greatly troubled by feelings of powerlessness, frustration, and alienation. If people lived healthily to 100 or 120, if institutions were altered to meet their needs, we would likely have traded our problems of the aged for problems of youth. Retardation of aging could really mean prolongation of functional immaturity. Consider the young: isolated not only from the top of the ladders of power but also from some of their lower rungs, supported by or even living with parents into their thirties or beyond, kept in a protracted sexually mature "adolescence," frustrated, disaffected, rebellious or apathetic—the picture is not difficult to complete.

Clearly, to avoid such strains and disasters, great changes in social patterns and institutions would probably be needed, changes unlikely to occur except through strong centralized planning. The coming of such centralized planning will have consequences of its own, not all of them attractive or desirable, to say the least.

I have but scratched the surface of only one of the myriad areas of concern. The implications for society will be immense, and it boggles the mind to think of identifying them, much less to evaluate whether or not, on balance, we shall be better off. Some take a very gloomy view. One scientist colleague advised me in this matter to think of society as an organism, its individual members as cells. In this metaphor, unlimited prolongation of individual life would appear as a cancer, eating away at the body politic, and preventing new life and new growth—a matter to which I shall return. Still, one should stress that questions about consequences are always in large part empirical and cannot be assessed in advance—though it is none too early to begin to formulate the questions worth asking. One thing is clear: the stakes are very high and the issues very complex—enough to make us suspect utopian promises, projected from shallow glances through narrow lenses.

Against all these concerns about social consequences, it will be argued that we will soon enough adjust to a world of longevity. We will figure out a way. This confidence rests on what seems to be good evidence: we have always adjusted in the past. Let us grant this point. Let us for now overlook the fact that adjustment does not necessarily yield a more desirable state of affairs, and that not all change is progress. Let us not try to show that this technologically induced change may produce unprecedented changes, for which the history of past adjustments to novelty is an irrelevant source of optimism. Let us accept the optimist's view: longer life for individuals is an unqualified good; we will, in due time, figure out a way to cope with the social consequences.

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III

Conceding all this, how *much* longer life is an unqualified good for an individual? Ignoring now the possible harms flowing back to individuals from adverse social consequences, let us consider only the question "How much more life is good for us as individuals, other things being equal?" How much more life do we want, assuming it to be healthy and vigorous? Assuming that it were up to us to set the human life span, where would or should we set the limit and why?

The simple answer is that no limit should be set. Life is good, and death is bad. Therefore, the more life the better, provided, of course, that we remain fit and our friends do, too.

This answer has the virtues of clarity and honesty. But most public advocates of prolonging life through slowing aging deny such greediness. Immortality, or rather indefinite prolongation, is not their goal—it is, they say, out of the question (one wonders whether this is only because they deem it impossible). They hope instead for something reasonable; just a few more years.

How many years is reasonably few? Let us start with ten. Which of us would find unreasonable or unwelcome the addition of ten healthy and vigorous years to his or her life, years like those between ages thirty and forty? We could learn more, earn more, see more, do more. Maybe we should ask for five additional years? Or ten more? Why not fifteen, or twenty, or more?

If we can't immediately land on the reasonable number of added years, perhaps we can locate the principle. What is the principle of reasonableness? Time needed for our plans and projects yet to be completed? Some multiple of the age of a generation, say, that we might live to see great grandchildren fully grown? Some notion—traditional, natural, revealed—of the proper life span for a being such as man? We have no answer to this question. We do not know even how to choose among the principles for setting our new life span. The number of years chosen will have to be arbitrary, barring some revelation or discovery.

Under such circumstances, lacking a standard of reasonableness, we fall back on our wants and desires. Under liberal democracy, this means on the desires of the majority. Though what we desire is an empirical question, I suspect we know the answer: the attachment to life—or the fear of death—knows no limits, certainly not for most human beings. It turns out that the simple answer is the best: we want to live and live and not to wither and not to die. For most of us, especially under modern secular conditions in which more and more people believe that this is the only life they have, the desire to prolong the life span (even

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modestly) must be seen as expressing a desire *never* to grow old and die. However naive their counsel, those who propose immortality deserve credit: they honestly and shamelessly expose this desire.

Some, of course, eschew any desire for longer life. They profess still more modest aims: not adding years to life, but life to years. No increased life span, but only increased health, increased vigor, no decay. For them, the ideal life span would be our natural fourscore and ten, or if by reason of strength, fivescore, lived with full powers to the end, which end would come rather suddenly, painlessly, at the maximal age.

This has much to recommend it. Who would not want to avoid senility, crippling arthritis, the need for hearing aids and dentures, and the degrading dependencies of old age? Yet leaving aside whether such goals are attainable without simultaneously pushing far back the midnight hour, one must wonder whether, in the absence of these degenerations, we could remain content to spurn longer life, whether we would not become still more disinclined to exit. Would not death become even more of an affront? Would not the fear and loathing of death increase, in the absence of its antecedent harbingers? We could no longer comfort the widow by pointing out that her husband was delivered from his suffering. Death would always be untimely, unprepared for, shocking.

Montaigne saw it clearly, as he wrote in "That to Philosophize Is to Learn to Die":

> I notice that in proportion as I sink into sickness, I naturally enter into a certain disdain for life. I find that I have much more trouble digesting this resolution when I am in health than when I have a fever. Inasmuch as I no longer cling so hard to the good things of life when I begin to lose the use and pleasure of them, I come to view death with much less frightened eyes. This makes me hope that the farther I get from life and the nearer to death, the more easily I shall accept the exchange. . . . If we fell into such a change [decrepitude] suddenly, I don't think we could endure it. But when we are led by Nature's hand down a gentle and virtually imperceptible slope, bit by bit, one step at a time, she rolls us into this wretched state and makes us familiar with it; so that we find no shock when youth dies within us, which in essence and in truth is a harder death than the complete death of a languishing life or the death of old age; inasmuch as the leap is not so cruel from a painful life as from a sweet and flourishing life to a grievous and painful one.

Withering is nature's preparation for death, for the one who dies and for those who look upon him. We may wish to flee from it, perhaps, or seek to cover it over, but we must be cognizant of the costs of doing so.

By the way, it is well worth pausing to ask, Of *what* will we die in that golden age of prolonged vigor? Perhaps there will be a new spate of diseases, as yet unknown. More likely, the unnatural or violent causes

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will get us, as they increasingly do: some by auto, some by pistol, some by fire and some by drowning, some by lightning and some by bombing, some through anger and some through mercy, and some by poison from their own hand. Should we wish to avoid spilling blood, or desire a clean technological solution, we could require that our drink from the fountain of youth be accompanied by the implantation into our midbrains of an automatic self-destruction device, preset to go off at an unknown time some eighty to one hundred years hence. The control of natural decay might intensify the fear of violent death.

But to return from these macabre speculations to the main point: It is highly likely that either a modest prolongation of life with vigor or even only a preservation of youthfulness with no increase in longevity would make death even less acceptable, and would exacerbate the desire to keep pushing it further away—unless, for some reason, such life should also prove to be less satisfying.

Could longer, healthier life be less satisfying? How could it be, if life is good and death is bad? Perhaps the simple view is in error. Perhaps mortality is not simply an evil, perhaps it is even a blessing—not only for the welfare of the community, but even for us as individuals. How could this be?

IV

It goes without saying that there is no virtue in the death of a child or a young adult—or the untimely or premature death of anyone—before they have attained to the measure of man's days. I do not mean to imply that there is virtue in the particular *event* of death for anyone. Nor am I suggesting that separation through death is ever anything but pain for the survivors, those for whom the deceased was an integral part of their lives. Nor have I forgotten that, at whatever age, the process of dying can be painful and degrading, smelly and mean—though we now have powerful means to reduce much of, at least, the physical agony. Instead my question concerns the fact of our finitude, the fact of our mortality—that is, the fact that we must die, the fact that a full life for human beings has a biological, built-in limit, one that has evolved as part of our nature. Does this fact also have value? Is our finitude good for us—as individuals? (I intend this question entirely in the realm of natural reason and apart from any question about a life after death.)

To praise mortality must seem to be madness. If mortality is a blessing, it surely is not widely regarded as such. Life seeks to live, and rightly suspects all counsels of finitude. "Better to be a slave on earth than the king over all the dead," says Achilles in Hades to the visiting

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Odysseus, in apparent regret for his prior choice of the short but glorious life (*Odyssey*, Book XI, 489). Moreover, though some cultures—like the Eskimo—can instruct and moderate somewhat the lust for life, ours gives it free rein, beginning with a political philosophy founded on the fear of violent death and on the mastery of nature for the relief of man's estate, and reaching to our current cults of youth and novelty, the cosmetic replastering of the wrinkles of age, and the widespread, and not wholly irrational, anxiety about disease and survival. Finally, the virtues of finitude—if there are any—may never be widely appreciated in any age or culture, if appreciation depends on a certain wisdom, if wisdom requires a certain detachment from the love of oneself and one's own, and if the possibility of such detachment is given only to the few.

It is, I recognize, awkward, and perhaps improper, for a relatively young man—I am forty-four—to praise mortality, especially before his elders. Doubtless, there are people reading this essay who are close to death, who may indeed know that they or a loved one is dying, and my remarks may give offense or may appear insensitive. More important, because of the apparent remoteness of my own end of days, I may simply not know what I am talking about. If wisdom comes through suffering, perhaps only among the old can there be wisdom about mortality. I am acutely aware of these possibilities, but I persist, offering as my excuse that, if I am off the mark, time will teach me my lessons, and that, in any case, whether my answer be right or wrong, the question is certainly worth thinking about.

Let us, then, consider the problem of *boredom* and *tedium*. If the life span were increased—say by twenty years—would the pleasures of life increase proportionately? Would professional tennis players really enjoy playing 25 percent more games of tennis? Would the Don Juans of our world feel better for having seduced 1,250 women rather than 1,000? Having experienced the joys and tribulations of bringing up a family until the last left for college, how many parents would like to extend the experience by another ten years? Similarly, those who derive their satisfaction from progressing up the career ladder might well ask what there would be to do for fifteen years after one had become president of General Motors or after one had been chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee for a quarter of a century. Even less clear are the additions to personal happiness from more-of-the-same of the less pleasant and fulfilling activities that so many of us engage in so much of the time. It seems to be as the poet says: "We move and ever spend our lives amid the same things, and not by any length of life is any new pleasure hammered out." (Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, Book III, 1080)

The problem of boredom is worse for us than it once might have been

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because of how we have come to understand it. For us, with our self-centered views, the fear of boredom is the fear that sooner or later the world and its objects will fail us. For the medievals, boredom meant that we will fail the world. They regarded boredom as a defect within oneself. It was an aspect of sloth—one of the seven deadly sins, according to Thomas Aquinas—a sin against the Sabbath, that is, against the created order, not, as we might think, against the workweek.

The question of boredom leads directly to the second and more serious question, the question of *seriousness*. Could life be serious or meaningful without the limit of mortality? Is not the limit on our time the ground of our taking life seriously and living it passionately? To know and to feel that one goes around only once, and that the deadline is not out of sight, is for many people the necessary spur to the pursuit of something worthwhile. To number our days is the condition for making them count and for treasuring and appreciating all that life brings. Homer's immortals, for all their eternal beauty and youthfulness, live shallow and rather frivolous lives, their passions only transiently engaged, in first this and then that. They live as spectators of the mortals, who by comparison have depth, aspiration, genuine feeling, and hence a real center to their lives. Mortality makes life matter—not only in the chemist's sense.

There may be some activities, especially in some human beings, that do not require finitude as a spur. A powerful desire for understanding can do without external proddings, let alone one related to our mortality; and, as there is never too much time to learn and to understand, longer, vigorous life might be simply a boon. The best sorts of friendship, too, seem capable of indefinite growth, especially when growth is somehow tied to learning—though whether real friendship doesn't depend somehow on the shared perceptions of a common fate is a good question. But, in any case, I suspect these are among the rare exceptions. For most activities, and for most of us, I think it is crucial that we recognize and feel the force of not having world enough and time.

A third matter: *Beauty*. Death, says the poet, is the mother of beauty. What he means is not easy to say. Perhaps he means that only a mortal being, aware of his mortality and the transience and vulnerability of all natural things, is moved to make beautiful artifacts, objects that will last, objects whose order will be immune to decay as their maker is not, beautiful objects that will bespeak and beautify a world that needs beautification, beautiful objects for other mortal beings who can appreciate what they themselves cannot make, because of a taste for the beautiful, a taste perhaps connected to awareness of the ugliness of decay.

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Perhaps the poet means to speak of natural beauty as well, which beauty—unlike that of objects of art—depends on its impermanence. Does the beauty of flowers depend on the fact that they will soon wither? Does the beauty of spring warblers depend upon the fall drabness that precedes and follows? What about the fading, late afternoon winter light or the spreading sunset? In general, is change necessary to the beautiful? Is the beautiful necessarily fleeting, a peak that cannot be sustained? Or does the poet perhaps mean not that the beautiful is beautiful because mortal, but that our appreciation of its beauty depends on our appreciation of mortality—in us and in the beautiful? Does not love swell before the beautiful precisely on recognition that it (and we) will not always be? It seems too much to say that mortality is the cause of beauty and the worth of things, but not at all much to suggest that it may be the cause of our enhanced appreciation of the beautiful and the worthy and of our treasuring and loving them.

Finally there is the matter of that peculiarly human beauty, the beauty of *character*, of *virtue*, of *moral excellence*. To be mortal means that it is possible to give one's life, not only in one moment, say, on the field of battle—though that excellence is nowadays improperly despised—but also in the many other ways in which we are able in action to rise above attachment to survival. Through moral courage, endurance, greatness of soul, generosity, devotion to justice—in acts great and small—we rise above our mere creatureliness for the sake of the noble and the good. We free ourselves from fear, from bodily pleasures, or from attachments to wealth—all largely connected with survival—and in doing virtuous deeds overcome the weight of our neediness; yet for this nobility, vulnerability and mortality are the necessary conditions. The immortals cannot be noble.

Of this, too, the poets teach. Odysseus, long suffering, has already heard Achilles' testimony in praise of life, when he is offered immortal life by the nymph Calypso. She is a beautiful goddess, attractive, kind, yielding; she sings sweetly and weaves on a golden loom; her island is well ordered and lovely, free of hardships and suffering. Says the poet, "Even a god who came into that place would have admired what he saw, the heart delighted within him." Yet Odysseus turns down the offer to be lord of her household and immortal:

> Goddess and queen, do not be angry with me. I myself know that all you say is true and that circumspect Penelope can never match the impression you make for beauty and stature. She is mortal after all, and you are immortal and ageless. But even so, what I want and all my days I pine for is to go back to my house and see the day of my homecoming. And if some god batters me far out on the wine-blue water, I will endure it, keeping a stubborn spirit inside me, for already I

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have suffered much and done much hard work on the waves and in the fighting. (*Odyssey*, Book V, 215–224)

To suffer, to endure, to trouble oneself for the sake of home, family, and genuine friendship is truly to live and is the clear choice of this exemplary mortal. This choice is both the mark of his excellence and the basis for the visible display of his excellence in deeds both noble and just. Immortality is a kind of oblivion—like death itself.

V

Though in arguing the case for mortality I have tried to show that necessity is the mother of virtue, some might argue that I am rather trying to make a virtue of necessity, and, soon, not such a necessary necessity. Perhaps if we lived indefinitely, we would have no need of engagement, seriousness, beauty, or virtue. For we would be altogether different beings, perhaps capable of other satisfactions and achievements—though God only knows what they would be. And if mortality were such a blessing, why do so few cultures recognize it as such? Why do so many teach the promise of life after death, of something eternal, of something imperishable? We must face this challenge, for it leads us to the very heart of the question about mortality and the way we think about it.

What is the meaning of this concern with immortality? We are interested here not in the theological question but in the anthropological one: Why do human beings seek immortality? Why do we want to live longer or forever? Is it really first, and most, because we do not want to die, because we do not want to leave this embodied life on earth or give up our earthly pastimes, because we want to see more and do more? I do not think so. This may be what we say, but it is not what we mean. Mortality as such is not our defect, nor is bodily immortality our goal. Rather mortality is at most a pointer, a derivative manifestation, or an accompaniment of some deeper deficiency. That so many cultures speak of a promise of immortality and eternity suggests, first of all, a certain truth about the human soul: the human soul yearns for, longs for, aspires to some condition, some state, some goal toward which our earthly activities are directed but which cannot be attained during earthly life. Our soul's reach exceeds our grasp; it seeks more than continuance; it reaches for something beyond us, something that for the most part eludes us. True happiness, a genuine fulfillment of these deepest longings of our soul, is not in our power and cannot be fully attained, much less commanded. Our distress with mortality is the derivative

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manifestation of the conflict between the transcendent longings of the soul and the all-too-finite powers and fleshly concerns of the body.

What is it that we lack and long for? Notwithstanding their differences, many of our poets and philosophers have tried to tell us. One possibility is completion in another person. In Plato's *Symposium*, the comic poet Aristophanes speaks of the tragedy of human love and its unfulfillable aspiration. You may recall how we are said to spend our lives searching for our own complement, our own other half, from whom we have been separated since Zeus cleaved our original nature in half:

> When one of them—whether he be a boy-lover or a lover of any other sort—happens on his own particular half, the two of them are wondrously thrilled with friendship and intimacy and love, and are hardly to be induced, as it is said, to leave each other's side for a single moment. These are they who continue together throughout life, though they could not even say what they would have of one another. No one could imagine this to be the mere sexual connexion, or that such alone could be the reason why each rejoices in the other's company with so eager a zest: obviously *the soul of each is wishing for something else that it cannot express, only divining and darkly hinting what it wishes* [italics added]. Suppose that, as they lay together, Hephaestus should come and stand over them, and showing his implements should ask: "What is it, good mortals, that you would have of one another?"—and suppose that in their perplexity he asked them again: "Do you desire to be joined in the closest possible union, so that you shall not be divided by night or by day? If that is your craving, I am ready to fuse and weld you together in a single piece, that from being two you may be made one, that so long as you live, the pair of you, being as one, may share a single life; and that when you die you also in Hades yonder be one instead of two, having shared a single death. Bethink yourselves if this is your heart's desire and if you will be quite contented with this lot." Not one on hearing this, we are sure, would demur to it or would be found wishing for anything else: Each would unreservedly deem that he had been offered just what he was yearning for all the time, namely, to be so joined and fused with his beloved that the two might be made one. For this is the cause, that our ancient nature was this way and we were wholes: to the desire and pursuit of the whole, then, we give the name *eros*. (*Symposium*, 192B–193A)

Plato's Socrates both agrees and disagrees with Aristophanes. He agrees that we long for wholeness, completeness, but not in bodily or psychic union with a unique beloved. Rather, *eros* is the soul's longing for the noetic vision—that is, for the sight of the beautiful truth about the whole: our soul aspires most to be completed by knowledge, by understanding, by wisdom; for only by possessing such wisdom about the whole could we truly come to ourselves, could we be truly happy. Yet Plato too strongly hints that wisdom is not given to human beings, at least not in this life; *philosophia*, yes, the love and pursuit of wisdom, yes, but the possession of wisdom, no.

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The Bible also teaches about human aspiration. Once we dwelled in the presence of God, the source of all goodness and righteousness; now we are estranged. That separation from God's presence occurs as the immediate result of eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, itself an act of autonomy (since all choice is non-obedience) and hence of separation. The serpent promised "and your eyes shall be opened and you shall be as God," but "their eyes were opened and they saw that they were naked." No, we are not as God; we are naked, weak, not self-sufficient, possessed by powerful and rebellious desires that we can neither master nor satisfy alone. We are ashamed before ourselves, and we hide from God, even before we are caught and punished, and well before we are blocked from the possibility of tasting of the tree of life. The expulsion from the garden merely ratifies our estrangement from God and testifies to our insufficiency, of which our accompanying mortality is but a visible sign—or perhaps even God's gift to put an end to our sad awareness of deficiency.

The decisive facts about all these—and many other—accounts of human aspiration, notwithstanding their differences, are the following:

1. Man longs not so much for deathlessness as for wholeness, wisdom, goodness.
2. This longing cannot be satisfied fully in our embodied earthly life—the only life, by natural reason, we know we have. Hence the attractiveness of any prospect or promise of a different and thereby fulfilling life hereafter. We are, in principle, unfulfilled and unfulfillable in earthly life, though human happiness—that semblance of complete happiness of which we are capable—lies in pursuing that completion to the full extent of our powers.
3. Death itself, mortality, is not the defect, but a mark of that defect.

From these facts, the decisive inference is this:

This longing—any of these longings—cannot be answered by prolonging earthly life. No amount of more-of-the-same will satisfy our own deepest aspirations.

Even the Christian promise of the end of days, which includes a resurrection of the body, is not to be understood vulgarly as the beginning of a never-ending and greatly eased earthly life of the sort we know, an uninterrupted gala of wining and dining, of winters in the Bahamas and summers on the Riviera, of disco dancing in golden slippers and Super Bowls on the heavenly turf, of listening to Elvis Presley or Caruso, of playing ball with Babe Ruth or making love to Marilyn Monroe. The kingdom of heaven is a promise of redemption, of purity, of wholeness in the presence of love and holiness.

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If this is correct, then the proper meaning of the taste for immortality, for the imperishable and eternal, is not a taste that the conquest of aging would satisfy: we would still be incomplete; we would still lack wisdom; we would still lack God's presence; we would still lack purity. Mere continuance will not buy happiness. Worse, its pursuit threatens human happiness by distracting us from the goal(s) toward which our souls naturally point. By diverting our aim, by misdirecting so much individual and social energy toward the goal of bodily immortality, we may seriously undermine our chances for living as well as we can and for satisfying to some extent, however incompletely, our deepest longings for what is best. The implication for human life is hardly nihilistic: once we acknowledge and accept our finitude, we can concern ourselves rather with living well, and care first and foremost for the *well-being* of our souls, and not so much for their mere existence.

VI

But perhaps this is all a mistake. Perhaps there is no such longing of the soul. Perhaps there is no soul. Certainly modern biology doesn't speak about the soul; neither does medicine or even our healers of the soul, our psychiatrists. Perhaps we are just animals, complex ones to be sure, but animals nonetheless, content just to be here, frightened in the face of danger, avoiding pain, seeking pleasure.

Curiously, however, biology has its own view of our nature and its inclinations. Biology also teaches about transcendence, though it eschews talk about the soul. Much as it acknowledges and delineates our capacities and instincts for self-preservation and our remarkable powers to restore and maintain our wholeness, biology, too, teaches us how our life points beyond itself—to our offspring, to our community, to our species. Man, like the other animals, is built for reproduction. Man, more than other animals, is also built for sociality. And, man, alone among the animals, is built for culture—not only through capacities to transmit and receive skills and techniques, but also through capacities for shared beliefs, opinions, rituals, traditions. The origins of these powers for culture and their significance are matters of dispute, but their existence is not.

Many have called attention to man's remarkable biological characteristics that prepare him for culture, including the following: (1) the prolonged period of neonatal yet still embryonic dependence and development, called by Portmann the period in the social womb, during which the child learns to speak and stand and begins to perform voluntary actions; (2) the upright posture, which permits a beholding of the world (in turn eliciting our curiosity), which exposes things at a

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distance and at the same time frees the hands to fashion means for overcoming distance, which brings us face to face with our fellows, opposed but in communication; (3) our capacity for speech, requiring special laryngeal, respiratory, and cerebral development, as well as a relation to others with whom that capacity is actualized through a learned language; (4) a sense of time and powers of imagination and forethought for the future; (5) special social passions, such as friendliness, shame, pity, and respect, which permit and are cultivated in community; and (6) special ethical powers, including a capacity for acquiring a sense of responsibility, of fairness, and concern for posterity, which culture requires but also nurtures.

To be sure, the present orthodoxy in sociobiology treats our sociality as but a fancy mechanism geared to the sole end of the survival of the human gene pool. A richer sociobiology might come to understand that it is not just *survival*, but survival of *what*, that matters. It might again remember that sociality and culture, admittedly part of the means of preservation, are also part of the end for which we seek to preserve ourselves, and that only in community and through culture do we come into our own as that most special animal. But however this may be, biology does teach that we must see ourselves as species-directed, and not merely self-directed. We are built with leanings toward and capacities for perpetuation.

Is it not possible that aging and mortality are part of this construction, and that life span and the rate of aging have been selected for their usefulness to the task of perpetuation? Could not overturning the process of aging place a great strain on our nature, jeopardizing our project and depriving us of success? For, interestingly, perpetuation is a goal that is attainable. Here is transcendence of self that is largely realizable. Here is a form of participation in the enduring that is open to us, without qualification—provided, that is, that we remain open to it.

Biological consequences aside, simply to covet a prolonged life span for ourselves is both a sign and a cause of our failure to open ourselves to this—or any higher—purpose. It is probably no accident that it is a generation whose intelligentsia proclaim the meaninglessness of life that embarks on its indefinite prolongation and that seeks to cure the emptiness of life by extending it. For the desire to prolong youthfulness is not only a childish desire to eat one's life and keep it; it is also an expression of a childish and narcissistic wish incompatible with devotion to posterity. It seeks an endless present, isolated from anything truly eternal, and severed from any true continuity with past and future. It is in principle hostile to children, because children, those who come after, are those who will take one's place; they are life's answer to mortality, and their presence in one's house is a constant reminder that one no

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longer belongs to the frontier generation. One cannot pursue youthfulness for oneself and remain faithful to the spirit and meaning of perpetuation.

In perpetuation, we send forth not just the seed of our bodies, but also a bearer of our hopes, our truths, and those of our tradition. If our children are to flower, we need to sow them well and nurture them, cultivate them in rich and wholesome soil, clothe them in fine and decent opinions and mores, and direct them toward the highest light, to stand straight and tall—that they may take our place as we took that of those who planted us and who made way for us, so that in time they, too, may make way and plant. But if they are truly to flower, we must go to seed; we must wither and give ground.

To be fair, I must confess that to seek immortality through one's children can be a snare and a delusion, perhaps today more than ever. Continuity of lineage, and, more important, of mores and beliefs, is in no way assured, not least because our ethos has become less hospitable to the concern for transmission, in our effort to push back our own deaths and ensure our private rights to the endless pursuit of happiness, understood as end-less pursuit. But there is something that we can certainly preserve and perpetuate, and only through sowing fresh seed. To see this we need to look again at the nature of growing old.

Those who look primarily at the aging of the body and those who look upon the social and cultural aspects of aging forget a crucial third aspect: the psychological effects simply of the passage of time—that is, of experiencing and learning about the way things are. After a while, no matter how healthy we are, no matter how respected and well-placed we are socially, most of us cease to look upon the world with fresh eyes. Little surprises us, nothing shocks us, righteous indignation at injustice dies out. We have seen it all already, seen it all. We have often been deceived, we have made many mistakes of our own. Many of us become small-souled, having been humbled not by bodily decline and not by "the system" but by life itself. So our ambition also begins to flag, or at least our noblest ambitions. As we grow older, we "aspire," as Aristotle puts it in the *Rhetoric*, "to nothing great and exalted and crave the mere necessities and comforts of existence." At some point, most of us turn and say to our intimates, "Is this all there is?" and we settle, we accept our situation, if we are lucky enough to have been prepared to accept it. In many ways, perhaps in the most profound ways, most of us go to sleep long before our deaths. In the young, aspiration, hope, freshness, boldness, openness spring anew—even if and when it takes the form of overturning our monuments. Immortality for oneself through children may be a delusion, but participating in the natural and eternal renewal of human possibility through children is not—not even in today's world.

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For it still stands as it did when Homer made Glaukos say to Diomedes:

> As is the generation of leaves, so is that of humanity. The wind scatters the leaves to the ground, but the live timber burgeons with leaves again in the season of spring returning. So one generation of man will grow while another dies. (*Iliad,* Book VI, 146–150)

And yet it also still stands, as this very insight of Homer's itself reveals, that human beings are in another and decisive respect unlike the leaves; that the eternal renewal of human beings embraces also the eternally human possibility of learning and self-awareness; that we, too, here and now may participate with Homer, with Plato, with the Bible, yes with Descartes and Bacon, in catching at least some glimpse of the enduring truths about nature and human affairs; and that we, too, may hand down and perpetuate this pursuit of wisdom and goodness to succeeding generations for all time to come.

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Letter Home

LAWRENCE RAAB

This afternoon I saw a deer inside that narrow
strip of woods between the rose gardens
and the Northway. She bolted, paused, turned,
twice. I wasn't going to move much closer,
and I was willing to feel like the intruder.
But the noise she made dismissed me—
two chuffs of annoyance or disgust.
And then on the road back three groundhogs
in the long grass heard me coming and rushed
beneath the cottage. Jennifer, I think
you would have laughed out loud to see
their lopsided, ungainly waddle—
foolish creatures, and not designed
to hurry gracefully. But I imagine
fear was what they really felt.
Someone who knows more about these things
might tell us even that's too human
a word to work exactly. One sound
that doesn't fit—my heavy step
on the path—triggers the instinct to escape,
and afterwards what passes
for the usual allows their tentative return.
Also I know the birds don't sing for gladness,
although it's hard not to want to think so
when we're happy. Which is also to suggest
that the big smile you inscribe upon the sun,
saying, each time you explain a picture,
"Look, it has a face," makes that face your own
laughing kindly back at you, and sometimes
I choose to believe it's mine as well.

LAWRENCE RAAB is an associate professor of English at Williams College. He is the author of two books of poems, *Mysteries of the Horizon* and *The Collector of Cold Weather*, and a third, *Years Later*, which is forthcoming.

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Watching the Pendulum in Education

VERMONT ROYSTER

CONSIDER TWO PROPOSITIONS. The first is that for at least two generations the educational system in this country has been falling to a low estate (if it has not actually failed) because it was built on a false philosophical base. The second—and one I find more cheerful—is that within the past few years there has been a widespread effort to re-examine that philosophical base. Many of the faults in the system have been recognized. The pendulum of educational fashion may not yet have swung far, but it is indeed beginning at long last to swing.

So that the reader may understand my own prejudices, let me explain their origin. I am the product of a most peculiar education, one that will strike you at once as an anachronism. It was begun by a father who never felt comfortable in the twentieth century. He would have been more at home in the age of Pericles or in classical Rome. I was thus chanting the principal parts of Latin verbs before I could read. A six-year-old can delight in chanting *tango, tangere, tetigi, tactum* with no idea of what they mean.

My earliest formal schooling was in a classroom run by an Episcopal minister. He still made use of those McGuffey Readers, once ubiquitous in American schoolrooms. McGuffey treated children as adults, though not yet fully formed. He believed they could understand even difficult things if given in short doses, so when he included a dollop of Samuel Johnson in a reader, the young student got his Samuel Johnson pure.

Thereafter, I graduated from the public high school in Raleigh, North Carolina. It may seem strange, but in 1929 the Raleigh high school included in its curriculum four years of Latin and an introductory course in Greek (the latter having two students in the class, including me).

From there I went to the Webb School in Tennessee, an anachronism even in 1931. Not only did it require four years of Latin and two of Greek before you could graduate, it also followed the dictum of its founder in every subject—"one must *know*, not *almost know*"—whether it was the

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dates of history or the manipulation of equations in calculus or the uses of the subjunctive in English composition. I next attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where I majored in the classics and English literature. Indeed, I went into journalism because a nodding acquaintance with Euripides hardly qualified me for anything more useful.

With that as background, let me leap forward to the time when my two daughters were in the public schools of a Westchester County village, one we had chosen because of the good reputation of its schools. One day my elder daughter came home with word that she was going to read *David Copperfield* in her English class. I was delighted because I remembered it fondly. That evening I picked up her book to renew the pleasure, but as I read, something seemed awry. That led me to rummage among old books and find my schoolboy copy. Then I discovered Dickens's language had been "simplified." When I took this up with the principal, he was puzzled by my outrage. Much of Dickens's language, he noted, was archaic and therefore difficult for the pupils. He also explained that many of his high school students didn't go on to college, and this way they at least got the Dickens story. My reply was that they could get the story from a movie and that an acquaintance with the original Dickens was more important for those *not* going to college than for those who were. The latter might make up the deficiency later. The principal was not impressed with my argument that to let the pupils believe they had read Dickens, when in fact they hadn't, was a form of cheating.

A couple of years later, this same school employed as a temporary English teacher a young man with a master's degree from DePauw, who was working on his doctorate at Columbia. He knew his subject, was enthusiastic about it, and transmitted that enthusiasm to our younger daughter. With other parents, we petitioned the school to keep him as long as he was available. It was explained that this was not possible because he had had no education courses and so wasn't qualified under New York State rules.

You won't be surprised at this point to learn that my wife and I took our daughters out of the public schools and sent them to a neighboring private school—this at a time when we could ill afford it—where they received a good secondary education, despite the fact that many of its teachers weren't "qualified" to teach in public schools. Their excellent French teacher, for example, was a native French lady who had no American schooling at all. If you wonder at the persistence of private schools in a country that provides public education at public expense, perhaps this helps explain it. Anyway, it was the beginning of my long war with the "educationists," which is not yet ended.

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Let me now leap further forward in time. In 1972, after I retired as editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, I was invited to teach both journalism and political science at Chapel Hill—neither of which, incidentally, I had ever formally studied. I found the university much changed from my own undergraduate years. For instance, I discovered it was possible for a student to get a bachelor of arts degree either without studying mathematics or without learning a foreign language—any foreign language, never mind that Latin or Greek bit. That is, a student could take *either* mathematics *or* a foreign language, the one being accepted as a substitute for the other.

The political science course I was to teach was "Modern American Politics." In explaining it to the departmental faculty meeting, I said students could not understand politics of the 1970s well without some understanding of the New Deal period of the 1930s. The faculty approved the course, but afterward one of its distinguished members came up to me and remarked that they had abandoned "the historical approach to political science." I held my tongue in deference to my betters.

But the real shocker came in journalism. At Chapel Hill a student may not enter the journalism school until at least his junior year. Yet I found that so many of the would-be students were so poorly prepared in spelling and the fundamentals of English grammar that the school had been forced to institute a required test in these subjects. It counted for no credit, a student could take it several times, but he or she had to pass it before graduation. On the average, 50 percent of the entering juniors failed the test—a simple one designed for high school graduates—on the first try. I soon learned that the students could not be blamed for this woeful situation. Many of them were bright, articulate, and no more reluctant to study than their parents had been. The problem was that they had passed through four years of high school and two of college without ever being taught their own language.

Some universities, my own included, tried to meet this problem with remedial courses in basic English for entering freshmen. Here they encountered a new problem. Too few members of the English faculty were sufficiently grounded in English grammar to teach it—or even thought teaching it important. Many felt such assignments demeaning to their academic dignity; they preferred to lecture on "Trends in the Modern American Novel." Hence, these remedial courses were left to young instructors who were products of the educational system that had created the deficiencies in the first place. With the disappearance from grammar school of the Blue Back Speller and the practice of parsing sentences, competence at spelling and the constructing of English sentences diminished. Soon only a few elderly schoolteachers—or the

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rare eccentric—were left to teach these skills, and the new educational philosophy discouraged them from doing so. A vicious circle had set in.

I was also invited to lead a seminar for graduate students and advanced undergraduates called "The Press and Society." Its purpose was to explore for would-be journalists, historically and philosophically, the role of the press in American society: What are a journalist's ethical obligations, if any, to the other institutions of society, including government? This is a topic much debated these days by the public and within the press itself.

I had the conceit to begin with the problem of Socrates, who disapproved of some of the laws of Athens and yet, being condemned by them, chose not to flee but to submit to his own death under those laws. On my first day, I began by asking for a volunteer to recount the story of Socrates. Dead silence. After some futile efforts in this endeavor, I asked how many had *heard* of Socrates. At this point ten of sixteen hands went up. That was something, I suppose, but I couldn't help thinking that perhaps two thousand years later Socrates was, after all, at last dead. Now ignorance does not necessarily derive from want of intelligence. If the students I encountered who had never learned the story of Socrates had other amazing gaps in their general knowledge of history and were woefully deficient in knowledge of their native language, none of this could be blamed on them. The fault lay in the education that had been offered them all the way through college.

Let me here quickly enter a disclaimer lest I be misunderstood. I do not mean to imply that the university at Chapel Hill did not offer a sound education to those students with both an aptitude and a desire to learn. In 1971, as in 1931, a student had only to ask and it would be given. The university had excellent departments in the classics, in history, in mathematics, and in other areas. The problem lay elsewhere.

It began with an administration that was unwilling to take a stand on what constituted a well-rounded education. It was fearful, I suppose, of "regimenting" the students, of crushing their "individuality," of being "authoritarian." By 1971 all these words had become pejorative terms. Instead, a student was offered a sort of smorgasbord from which he might choose as he pleased. The result was that many students simply took a little bit of this, a little bit of that, and ended up with a smattering of ignorance. If they didn't like mathematics, let them take Spanish—or Swahili.

This attitude carried over into some of the departmental faculties. For example—and here I cite from the catalogue—a student could major in history with a survey course in "The World since 1945" or one in the history of Islamic civilization. Thereafter, he could pick among courses such as "Women in Europe," "The Urban World in the Twentieth

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Century," "Race Relations in America," or "Revolutionary Changes in Contemporary China."

Each of these could be valuable in itself. My point is that it was at least theoretically possible for a history major to emerge with little grasp of the sweep of history. How could he or she understand the changing role of women in Europe, or race relations in America, without a thorough understanding of the progress of history in Europe or America in its many other aspects? And how is an undergraduate to understand the revolutionary changes in contemporary China without some prior knowledge of traditional China? A course in earlier Chinese history was indeed there for the taking but catalogued as one for advanced undergraduates or graduate students. I thought—and I think—that's putting the cart before the horse.

When I broached questions of this sort with my colleagues, I was told that a student should have had, for example, American history in high school and therefore would have no need to pursue it further unless that was the student's major interest. Like examples could be drawn from other departments—in the study of English literature for instance. As for those deficiencies in spelling and English grammar that I encountered among junior-level college students in journalism, a contributing factor was certainly that many professors in other fields, such as history, paid little attention to composition faults, even in essay exams. Their interest, so they told me, was in content, not writing style. It wasn't *their* business to teach English.

I realize it's dangerous to generalize from all this and that I do so at my peril. Nonetheless, when I put together in my mind those encounters with modern high school education and my reaction to what I found at the college or university level, I cannot avoid certain impressions. One is that the root of the problem in much modern education is the idea that young people shouldn't be *required* to learn anything. The prevailing doctrine has long been that if a young person put in the requisite number of years in high school, he was *entitled* to a diploma. To set standards of accomplishment, to require the student to wrestle with something strange and difficult (as with the language of Dickens or the precision of algebra and trigonometry) was unfair, not socially acceptable.

A consequence of this practice has been the devaluation of a high school diploma. It can't be trusted to mean anything—as every college admissions officer and every would-be employer has come to recognize. The student himself has suffered the greatest loss; he has been led to think he has an acceptable secondary education, when in fact he hasn't. He has been left ill-prepared to make his way in the real world. It is also a very real loss to society. This has done particular injury to those underprivileged in their home environment. The public schools have

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failed to make up for the handicaps of those not reared in families where reading is a habit and learning is a family tradition.

The fault at the college level is somewhat different but alike in kind. We are all familiar with grade inflation. Here again, to give an undeserved A or B—or even an undeserved passing C—cheats the student in a subtle but very real way. It is an extension of the widely accepted view that young people should not be *required* to learn anything, to meet any standards anyone might claim are "arbitrary." This fault extends all the way to graduate school. In the graduate school at Chapel Hill we do not use A, B, and C. The grades—that is, those above failure—are "passing," "satisfactory," and "honors." I've had graduate students who received a satisfactory grade come to me in much unhappiness to ask what was wrong with their paper or exam. When I've replied that they wouldn't have received a satisfactory grade if they hadn't done work of merit, they remain puzzled. If there was nothing wrong with their work, they wanted to know, why not an honors grade? I've had difficulty explaining why, at least to me, the honors grade should be reserved for those who do, not merely satisfactory, but exceptional work. The distinction escapes some students.

To what can I attribute these matters of which I complain? I think they grow out of a philosophy of education that has lately had much currency. Some of that philosophy is an improvement over what existed before and ought to be adhered to. My complaints—and I think those of the public as well—grow out of the distortions and misapplication of a changing philosophy, although I'm not sure that the public recognizes the cause-and-effect relationship.

A little more than a hundred years ago education was considered an elitist enterprise. In the late eighteenth century, Thomas Jefferson was unable to persuade the state of Virginia to provide even as little as three years of elementary education at public expense. The first public high school did not open until 1821, in Boston. It provided three years of free instruction in such subjects as English, mathematics, geography, history, logic, and civics; and the curriculum included as well both Latin and Greek. It thus reflected in matter and manner the private schools already in existence. Over the next hundred years education came to be looked upon as something society should provide for all its citizens—including education at the higher levels. The University of North Carolina became the first operating university supported by state funds. The national government entered the picture with the founding of the land-grant colleges. The contribution of all these events to the welfare of society cannot be overestimated.

By the beginning of this century, under the influence of John Dewey and others, ideas also began to change as to what ought to be taught in

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these public schools and how it ought to be taught. Dewey's seminal work was published in 1900. Unfortunately, or so I think, Dewey's followers did not always have his common sense. "Learning by rote" became a pejorative term, as if there were any other way to learn such things as the multiplication tables. Schools sprang up to teach the technique of teaching, which indeed stood in need of improvement. Gradually, though, the technique of teaching came to seem more important than what was taught. So it is that in time we have come to have English teachers who cannot write simple English and math teachers who are lost beyond simple algebra. We have arrived at the point where holding a master's degree in English, or even a doctorate, does not "qualify" a person to teach English to high school students.

The absurdity of all this has been compounded by the populism that has overtaken education in the past generation or so. Every student, regardless of aptitude or interest, is compelled to receive the same instruction. It has become politically impossible to separate young people according to their ability. All have to be taught at the same pace. The inevitable result is that many brighter students become bored and lose interest, while others become lost in the horse latitudes of education.

At the university level, quite apart from the problem of poor preparation at the time of admission, there's another philosophical problem. Perhaps I can get at it best by posing this question: What range of knowledge does it take to make an "educated person"? There was a time, once, when that question would have been unnecessary. There was a common consensus that an educated person should feel at home with language, especially his own language and its literature, with the principles of mathematics, with the basic concepts of the physical sciences, with an awareness of the progress of history from ancient times to his own, and with the questions that have perplexed philosophers since antiquity. A learned person might be more learned in one field than another. But to be called an educated person he should at least have some familiarity with all areas of learning.

Then, somewhere along the way, we lost the consensus of what constitutes an educated person. One reason for this has been the proliferation of knowledge in every realm. We have long passed the point where a Jefferson could take all human knowledge to be his province. It is almost impossible now to encompass all the knowledge in one field or to have more than a superficial acquaintance with fields outside one's area of specialization. In the face of that seemingly insuperable problem, those who directed higher education threw up their hands and gave up even the concept of the educated person.

One consequence of the abandonment of this concept was the

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fragmentation of graduate-level education. Our universities no longer have "a" graduate school; they have many. There are graduate schools of medicine, of law, of business administration, of journalism, of library science, of education, of engineering, of social work, and so on—and each with its own dean.

Now, I have no quarrel with specialization. When it comes time to take out my gallbladder, I want a highly trained person who knows where it is, how to get at it, and what to do after he's found it. I respect the truly expert in any field, from carpentry to computers. But I know doctors—very competent ones—who couldn't be called educated by anyone's definition; so too with lawyers, engineers, or MBAs—not to mention journalists.

That one has a doctorate in history or classical languages may not warrant any familiarity with the physical sciences or an understanding of the mathematical way of thinking. A certificate as a doctor of philosophy may disguise a woeful ignorance of Newton or Einstein, for all that these men have influenced our view of the world more than any since Aristotle or Plato. Despite the title, he or she may know little not only of those ancient thinkers but also of Spinoza, Locke, Hume, or others who have thought much on the human condition. Moreover, the reading of doctoral dissertations is not always a cheering experience. Usually research has been diligently done in whatever corner of learning the candidate may be pursuing—the examining committees are demanding on that point. It is the organization of the material, the effort to communicate by sentences and paragraphs, that causes disappointment.

A friend of mine is director of a university press hungry for scholarly books to publish. He is flooded with manuscripts, but few impress him with their intellectual merits. And he tells me that even when he finds one, it all too often requires the labor of Hercules to get it into presentable form through editing and rewriting. He finds that depressing, and so do I. The explanation, I think, is that the graduate schools are inheriting from the educational system below. They get the pick of the crop and at times find someone exceptional, but graduate school is too late to make up for earlier educational deficiencies. Mediocrity is mediocrity wherever you find it.

Now, having said all this, let me go on to say that I sense a change of direction, a swing of the pendulum. In my own state, North Carolina, we are abandoning the idea that mere attendance at high school entitles one to a diploma. Bodily attendance for four years will get a young person a certificate attesting to that. A diploma of graduation will hereafter be reserved for those who meet established standards. Those standards may not be of the highest level in reading, writing, and arithmetic—there is much argument about how high they should be set—but some standards

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are better than none. A high school diploma in North Carolina, at least, will cease to be a meaningless document. The state has also established within the public school system special schools for those who are exceptionally talented in the arts, in mathematics, or in other fields. It is even in the process of establishing a publicly supported boarding school to better prepare students of ability for college. In one sense this is a return to elitism in education, but it will be an individually earned elitism, not one based on family fortune or racial or other background.

New Jersey and other states are also experimenting with what are called "magnet" schools. I note with amusement that one of these, for grades one through eight, is to be called a "classical school." Translated from educational jargon, that designation has nothing to do with classical languages. It simply means a school in which there is special emphasis on reading, writing, and arithmetic—once the purpose of all elementary schools.

The same changing tide is creeping into higher education. It was Harvard that began the trend toward the smorgasbord curriculum at the university level, other colleges following like sheep. Now Harvard has reversed herself, and others are again following her to school. I can illustrate this point with the new curriculum that has just been approved for undergraduates at my university in Chapel Hill. Henceforth, freshmen and sophomores must complete two courses in English composition; at least one mathematics course beyond the level of simple algebra; two courses in one foreign language; two courses in Western or comparative history, which must span at least two centuries; and two courses in the physical sciences, of which one must be a laboratory course. In addition the students must take at least one course in what is termed "philosophical perspective," a set of courses that addresses questions about forms of government, the purposes of social organization, and the scope of human obligations. During their junior and senior years those seeking a bachelor of arts degree must complete one additional course in each of these categories, regardless of the major field they have selected.

When this new curriculum was finally approved by the faculty, I read it with some amazement and dug up the university catalogue of 1931, fifty years earlier. As I suspected, the present proved an echo of that distant past.

If the same kind of ferment has reached postgraduate education, it has escaped my notice. But if the revolution—or rather counter-revolution—that is talked of at the undergraduate level lives up to its manifesto, graduate education cannot escape being affected.

As things are at present, clearly not every graduate student, as a product of the educational system of recent years, appears to me an

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educated person. That is, while their knowledge may be deep in their chosen specialty, it is limited in scope. This is not altogether a fault of graduate schools per se, but they cannot escape its consequences, and, as far as I can see, they do little to lessen the deficiencies. This seems particularly true of the professional graduate schools—law, medicine, or business administration—but the other traditional graduate schools also do not escape it.

What is more, while examining committees for master's degrees and doctorates are diligent in examining candidates on the quality of their research, they do not pay much attention to the willingness or ability of candidates to relate their newly acquired knowledge to broader questions, even within the general field of their specialty. The result is, all too often, dust-covered theses or dissertations, which languish unread upon library shelves—and deservedly so.

But here, too, the pendulum, I think, is bound to swing as the philosophy of education swings. We should soon begin to see students entering graduate school better prepared in the fundamentals acquired at the primary and secondary levels of schooling and with a broader perspective opened up to them by "new" undergraduate curricula. The net result, I'm confident, will be an improvement in the quality of education for those earning graduate degrees.

So I am by no means a pessimist about the future of American education. When I look at the whole continuum, from the first grade all the way through the higher levels, I see a ferment in current-day educational philosophy. Out of it is coming—slowly, perhaps, but surely nonetheless—a revolution, or, more accurately, a counter-revolution against the educational philosophy of the past half century or more.

Two things about this counter-revolution strike me especially. One is that its seeds were not sown in academia. This counter-revolution sprang from a dissatisfaction among the people generally—parents who saw that their children, who had been exposed to eight to ten years of basic education, still could not read or write or do simple sums. The parents began to realize something was wrong, even though they may not have known what, and they began to cry for change. The best that can be said for the educational establishment is that it is beginning to respond to this cry.

The second thing that strikes me is the slowness with which the counter-revolution has reached into the upper levels of the educational establishment. It was only last year that my university re-examined, and was willing to change, its basic educational philosophy as reflected in its undergraduate curriculum. Many other universities have not done so yet. As for graduate education, it has hardly begun to change at all.

Schools of law and medicine still discourage the applicant who has

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sought a broad education, preferring those who specialized early with premedical or prelaw courses. The result is the lawyer who cannot write clear, concise, intelligent English even in a letter. In medicine, the rarity of a physician who is also an educated, thoughtful person makes him a celebrity, like Lewis Thomas. And what of the more traditional graduate schools? Alas, here I fear we are still turning out far too many ignoramuses.

In English departments, or at least in some of them, a student does not study novels, plays, or poetry; he "decodes" them or "deconstructs texts." He does not read great literature in order to learn from the author's perceptions of the human condition and certainly not to examine and evaluate the writer's style in the use of language—no, he seeks to discover how the author performs "linguistic acts." With such jargon bandied about, who should be surprised at the turgid language of the critically acclaimed novels of today?

As for history—well, let me give a personal example: I am an adviser to a graduate student whose speciality is Soviet history from the death of Stalin through the rise and fall of Khrushchev. He reads Russian well, as far as I can tell. He has done excellent research on that period, and I've learned much from him that I did not know before. But when our conversation turns to Czarist Russia or to the parallel political and social developments in Western Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he seems puzzled that I think them pertinent to the understanding of why the Communist rise took place in Russia rather than—as Marx himself thought would happen—in more industrialized Europe. His knowledge of that part of history is even more superficial than my own.

Another example: I am the official adviser to a graduate journalism student working on a paper about the history of the First Amendment, particularly its free speech and free press clauses. He is well informed on its political and judicial history since 1776. I have had to prod him, however, to go back as far as the concordance signed in 1689 by William and Mary when they were offered the English throne only on condition that they sign a "Declaration of Rights," which for the first time gave to Englishmen those rights later embodied in our own First Amendment. That hadn't occurred to him.

What is wanting in both these examples, or so it seems to me, is an understanding of the relationship between one period of history and another, of how so often ideas interlock with one another. I'm reasonably confident the same complaints could be made about graduate education in the physical sciences. I feel sure that a graduate student in mathematics suffers if he knows no language but his own and is unaware how long it took the human mind to grapple with the problem of limits—as in

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defining the slope of a curved line—however skilled he may be today with calculus.

In any event, I think that the next area ripe for re-examination, for a counter-revolution, is that of graduate education. It is not enough to turn out doctors of medicine who know the uses of antibiotics but have given no thought to the purpose of life; or lawyers who know all about the latest tax statute but know nothing of the long reaches of the English common law to which they are the heirs; or doctors of education who are familiar with the latest audiovisual aids but who have given little thought to the basic purposes of education; or doctors of philosophy (which should still be an honored title) who have never read a philosopher and who, anyway, think philosophy a waste of time.

I do think a re-examination of the role and purpose of graduate education will come whether or not academia wills it. A revolution, or a counter-revolution, once underway cannot be stayed or confined. We have lately seen this in the political arena, and it will be so in education; for education, too, is a political matter, not in the partisan party sense of that word but in the Aristotelian sense of being something that concerns the interests of the body politic. And I know of few things more properly the concern of the American people than the kind and quality of education we offer new generations.

What is coming to be seen is that education should not be the same for everybody, for that inevitably means education reduced to the lowest common denominator. The public is beginning to recognize that the worthy goal of equality of opportunity for every young person does not mean equal entitlement to the rewards of accomplishment.

Education is a proud tower that everyone should be free to climb; but the climber should be able to halt at any stage without loss of dignity, without stigma, without shame. Standards, therefore, should not be lowered so as to put their achievement within the reach of all. Education, at any level, does not fulfill its function if it aims no higher than mediocrity. The education of a carpenter should aim to teach the highest skills of carpentry.

That is what the present ferment is all about. At the university level we are once again groping for an answer to that old question: What makes a truly educated person? It is because of that ferment that I keep a cheerful countenance. I cannot help, though, being struck by a certain irony. From the first grade through the last, the university postgraduate, we are seeking to make progress by going backward.

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Patterns of Fiction in Ancient Biography

MARY R. LEFKOWITZ

AT THE BEGINNING OF HIS LIFE OF ALEXANDER, Plutarch draws a clear distinction between history and biography: historians, he suggests, should make an exhaustive account of every action, particularly military contests; biographers must provide moral illustrations that reveal a man's character. Even though the purpose of biography differs from that of history, Plutarch implies that writers in either genre must select their information from the same source materials; it seems apparent also that both biographers and historians, in composing their narratives, frequently resort to a process that might euphemistically be called imaginative research, by which they reconstruct the past in terms of the present, elicit specific detail from general inference, and derive facts from fiction.

Imaginative research was needed to put isolated evidence into meaningful settings and to furnish explanations for extraordinary references. What, for example, in *Iliad* 6, were the *semata lygra* ("baneful signs") that the hero, Bellerophon, brought in a folded tablet from the king of Argos in Greece to the king of Lycia in Asia Minor (168–69)? A recent modern discussion of this passage draws on archaeological discoveries to argue that the "signs" (*semata*) were written in the Linear B syllabary used by the Mycenaean Greeks; it has also been suggested that the story could reflect ancient lines of communication or trade routes. But the Hellenistic commentators on whose work our surviving scholia, or marginal notes, to Homer are based had no such resources or ambitions. They did not try to reconstruct the past by reference to early forms of communication. Instead they relied on "plausibility" (*eikos*): "It is impossible that the people who discovered every artistic skill didn't know the alphabet. But some commentators think that they were sacred zodiac signs, like the ones the Egyptians use to explain things." In relying on common sense, these Homeric scholars were following a precedent set by historians. Herodotus did not seriously set out to

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explore differences in motivation between actions in the present and the past; he described the Trojan War as one of a series of retaliatory raids by Asians and Europeans. His sources were epic poems like the *Iliad*; he did not make a distinction between myth and history but rather between plausible and implausible accounts in terms of the standards of his own day.

As J. G. A. Pocock has remarked, "Greek society lacked sufficient organized past-relationships" to make true historiography possible; the early Greeks were capable of "historicization," that is, of reconstructing the past to fit into a description of the present, but not of explaining or reinterpreting evidences of the past, as if from a distance (*Comp. Studies in Society & History* 4, 1961–2, 220–1). Thucydides might seem to be an exception to this rule, but Herodotus's account of the Trojan War is, of course, an example of such historicization. But what about stories about historical figures such as Solon? What sources did Herodotus and other historians—Aristotle in the fourth century B.C., for instance, or Plutarch in the second century A.D.—use for him? The biographical tradition might suggest that ancient historians had access to sources other than Solon's poetry because of the detail with which they described events in his life. Since the historians represented him primarily as a statesman, at first there seems to be no reason to question the biographers' underlying assumption that he composed his poetry in response to particular political crises and that he recited it in public. If one looks closely at the testimonia (or documentation) in at least one case, however, it seems clear that, because later historians did not realize how the connotations of certain words had changed, the circumstances of Solon's performance were inferred incorrectly from his poetry. Solon wrote: "I myself am a herald come from lovely Salamis, placing an ornament of verse, a song *instead of a speech*" (*ant'agores*, Fr.1W). In the fourth century B.C. (two centuries after Solon), Solon's phrase *ant'agores* was understood as "before the marketplace," because the primary meaning of *agora* had become the setting for the speech rather than the speech itself. In fact, fourth-century orators spoke of a statue put up in their time in the marketplace at Salamis commemorating Solon's presence. Solon's metaphorical "I myself am a herald" caused further confusion. The third-century-A.D. biographer Diogenes Laërtius (or his source) understood Solon to mean that he had hired a herald to read his poems.

Diogenes' account of Solon's travels provides another clear example of the effects of retrospective anachronism: Diogenes says that Solon visited Soloi in Cyprus and also Soloi in Cilicia (to explain how these cities got their names); he does not say where he got this information. Plutarch in his *Life of Solon* quotes some elegiac verses by Solon addressed to the ruler of Soloi on Cypris's island, that is, Cyprus

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(Fr.19W). Soloi in Cilicia seemed more plausible to Diogenes, however, because in the Hellenistic Age it had become a more impressive place than its namesake in Cyprus. In making such a change of venue, Diogenes (or his source) was not being merely willful. He may indeed have meant it as a compliment, on the ground that Solon ought to have left his name to a city more important than Soloi in Cyprus as Diogenes knew it. Diogenes' notion of "truth" is thus quite different from ours but perhaps more representative of popular notions of historicity in the ancient world.

Our understanding of Solon's importance is not much affected by whether he went to Cilicia or to Cyprus (or both); but what about his famous legislation? Suppose the sources for that, and his political reforms, were likewise based on interpretations of and elaborations on his poetry? When Aristotle, for example, in the *Politics*, gives an account of the power Solon gave to the *demos*, or common people, of Athens, his plain prose might suggest that he was drawing on an independent narrative; but verbal echo indicates he had in mind specific verses (Fr.5W) from a poem we know he knew because he quotes it in another treatise, his *Constitution of Athens*. Solon's verses are very general: when he says "I gave the *demos* sufficient reward," it is not clear whether he is talking about money or rights. Aristotle's paraphrase is more specific: "He gave the *demos* political power (*dynamis*)." In at least one other case, also, Aristotle gives a meaning to Solon's lines that perhaps Solon never intended. Solon says he removed "fixed boundaries" and made the earth free; he brought back to Athens men who had been sold into slavery at home and abroad because of their poverty (Fr.36W). Aristotle took the lines to refer to release from debt, but the fourth-century-B.C. historian of Attica, Androtion, argues that Solon only reduced their interest payments (*FGrHist* 324F34, F 114). The inconsistency suggests that neither Aristotle nor Androtion had any external evidence to guide him. Another set of verses about rich and poor is cited by biographers as evidence of Solon's own moderation (Fr.24W), even though the lines are so general in application that in antiquity they were also attributed to the sixth-century-B.C. poet Theognis (19ff). When Solon says he kept his hands off violence and tyranny and pretends that people thought him a fool to have refused the opportunity to be a tyrant (Fr.33W), commentators took him to mean that he turned down actual requests.

These examples suggest that writers in the fourth century as well as in the fifth tended to re-create the past in terms of contemporary issues and problems in much the same way that Hellenistic scholars, reading Homer in Alexandria in Egypt, suggested that the "baneful signs" on Bellerophon's tablet might be "sacred zodiac signs, like the ones

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Egyptians use to explain things." For them, it would seem, historical or mythical events (they wouldn't make the distinction) were important because of their bearing on the present: Solon served as an example of the just lawgiver. As for the actual text of his laws, we have nothing earlier than the laws of Draco and Solon, copied onto stone in 409 B.C. (one hundred fifty years after Solon's time) from the wood axones (revolving wheels rather like postcard display stands) that stood in the marketplace. Anachronisms in some of the laws suggest that they came into being only in the early sixth century, two generations after Solon. But calling them "laws of Solon" would not have been intended as an act of forgery but rather a means of giving the laws the authority that they deserved. We might then question whether Solon himself invented, as his biographers allege, the traditional divisions of property classes in Athens, since he speaks in his surviving poetry only about giving sufficient honor to the rich and of keeping those who were rich and powerful from having too much; this sense of his own importance may have made him appear in retrospect to be the likely founder of laws and customs that, in reality, were developed by the community over many years.

Along with the tendency to discern in documents issues of current relevance runs a desire to set inherited poetry into a significant narrative framework. In Solon's case, as we have seen, general pronouncements are given specific application: if he mentions the temptations of tyranny, he himself was actually asked to be a tyrant. Solon speaks in his poems of visiting Cyprus; he also describes the Nile Delta. Biographers have interpreted these references as evidence that he himself traveled extensively around the Mediterranean. Although no explicit connection is made in the surviving poems between descriptions of foreign lands and political events in Athens, biographers have deduced from references to controversy in his poems that he made the journey to Cyprus and to Egypt in voluntary exile from Athens; the Spartan lawgiver, Lycurgus, according to tradition, made the Spartans swear that they would obey his laws until he returned, and then he went off into permanent exile. Exile and isolation give the lawgiver (and the poet) something of the status of a hero; in retrospect, the prophetic accuracy of Solon's statements about the Athenians' behavior made it possible to regard him as a sage. Herodotus describes how Solon on his travels visited King Croesus of Lydia, the richest man in the world, and advised him (accurately) about the transient nature of his happiness. One of Solon's speeches is based loosely on an extant poem, verses about the ages of man (27W); Herodotus transforms the speech into an ethical discourse about the limitations of human life. The authenticity of the meeting of Solon and Croesus was questioned even in antiquity on chronological grounds:

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traditionally Croesus came into power a generation after Solon's laws were thought to have been enacted in 590 B.C. But even if it can be assumed that Solon enacted his laws as late as the 570s and then met the young Croesus at the end of his exile in 560, there is reason to think of the story as representative rather than historical. Solon's warnings about the transience of wealth and power would have particular relevance for Athenians in the decades when Athens was enjoying her greatest prosperity, just before the Peloponnesian War. By reporting the meeting and giving it prominence at the beginning of his history of the wars between Greece and Asia, Herodotus did not mean to mislead his audience, but rather to give an important moral focus to his history.

I am suggesting (perhaps heretically) that Solon's biography is not so much an account of his life as it is of what people in the fifth century and after believed to be the significance of his life. Where quotations from his poetry (removed from their narrative framework) describe general attitudes, the biographical tradition specifies events and legislation; references to Egypt and Cyprus (or Cilicia!) in different poems are connected in his biography in a single journey, to which the story of a meeting with Croesus in Lydia is added, further illustrating the ethical purpose of his life. I cannot prove that Solon did not enact the legislation attributed to him and did not travel round the Mediterranean after serving as archon, but it must be remembered that there appear to have been no contemporary records other than his own poetry and yearly lists of archons (now lost). The chronicles of the Athenian *exegetai* ("expounders") recorded only ritual observances such as purifications, honoring of the dead, and sacrifices as indicated by oracles and prophetic signs. Thus even the chronicles of Athenian history (the "Atthides") on which Aristotle based his account of Solon's legislation were themselves necessarily based on legend. When one of these chronicle writers, Hellanicus, came to Athens from Lesbos in the late fifth century, he must have learned about the Athenian history by asking questions and by listening to poetry recitations, private and public.

Aristocratic families appear to have kept accounts of their achievements, and in Solon's case these appear to have taken the form of poetry and anecdotes. Plato portrays Critias telling Socrates that he knows a "strange tale" (*logos atopos*) of Solon's, which his grandfather Critias (who is the addressee of Solon's poem, Fr.22aW) learned from his own father, Dropides (*Tim.* 20e ff); he also says that as a child he had studied Solon's manuscripts (*grammata*), which had been his grandfather's and were now his own (Crit.113b). Socrates and the others listen to Critias tell his own version of Solon's account of what he learned in Egypt about Atlantis, with emphasis suited to their discussion of the constitution of the ideal state. Critias does not cite any of Solon's verses, but no one

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seems to care; clearly they expected (and welcomed) development and embellishment. A poem could be alluded to simply as general verification: when Aeschines reminds his audience that they have seen in the agora at Salamis the statue of Solon with his hand inside his himation in the same manner in which Solon addressed the Athenian assembly, he mentions the Salamis poem but does not cite any verses; as Demosthenes suggests in his opposing speech, Solon's text says nothing about where Solon put his hand. Evidently Aeschines expected that his audience would not object to his reconstruction of the situation as long as certain other elements in the tradition remained fixed. Even Homer has Hephaestus give Hera (*Il.*1.586ff) and Thetis (*Il.*18.394ff) different explanations of Hephaestus's fall into the sea and accounts of his recovery.

It seems unlikely that in these instances historical reconstruction was meant deliberately to deceive. Herodotus's audience knew that Homer did not think of the Trojan War primarily as a battle between Asia and Europe; when Herodotus described it as a precursor of the Persian War, they realized that he was re-creating it in terms of his recent experience. Herodotus does not need to supply statistics to document his statement that formerly great cities have not become small and that present great ones were previously little (I. 5.3–4), because it is a matter of faith, expressed often in Attic tragedy, that human fortune rises and falls in regular alternation.

Herodotus's history, like Aristotle's treatises a century later, was probably intended for a special elite who had leisure to attend his lectures. One can get a better sense of what ordinary people wanted to know about famous men from the anonymous short biographies, commentaries, and summaries that circulated on papyrus in the Hellenistic Age and after. These works are essentially compilations without artistic pretensions. In them we can discern, though in much cruder form, some of the methodology that characterizes the works of the famous historians, namely, a tendency to fit events into traditional narrative patterns with ethical significance and to give general information in the poems a specific application. The epic poet Hesiod, for example, tells us in the *Works and Days* that his father came by ship to Ascra, near Mount Helicon in Boeotia, from Cyme in Aeolis (633–40); the poem itself is addressed to his brother Perses. The information about their father is presented as an example of how men earn a living by merchant shipping, and he tells the story in a way that gives special emphasis to the major themes of the poem: his father did not flee "luxury, wealth, and happiness, but evil poverty, which Zeus gives to men"; Ascra is "bad in winter, harsh in summer, no good at any time." His description of the weather is dramatic exaggeration: Plutarch, a native of Boeotia, said that

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in his day the town had a climate relatively pleasant for that part of the world (Fr.82).

A few lines later Hesiod says he won a tripod in a singing contest at the funeral games of Amphidamas in Chalcis; he mentions his victory in order to demonstrate his poetic skill (654–7). His point is that he knows all about seafaring even though he has never been on a voyage longer than across the narrow strait between Aulis and Chalcis. He claims that the Muses taught him to sing "a hymn of praise too vast to be described." At the beginning of his other poem, the *Theogony*, he tells how the Muses came to him while he was pasturing his sheep; they spoke to him "first of all," distinguishing him from the other shepherds (26–28); they gave him a laurel branch and a "sacred voice" (*thespin auden*) to "sing what will be and what was before, and the race of the gods, and first and last of themselves." He lends excitement to the account by quoting the words the Muses spoke to him, but there the account ends, since no further details are needed to establish his poetic authority.

Since what Hesiod tells us about himself is primarily intended to offer his professional credentials, he omits the comprehensive detail one would expect in modern autobiography. But by the fourth century some of the missing information had been supplied. Ephorus of Cyme, a contemporary of Aristotle, gave Hesiod's father's name as Dios—apparently he derived it from a line in which Hesiod calls his brother Perses "of illustrious family," (*dion genos*) (WD 299–300, *FGrHist*70F1). Ephorus gave their mother's name (appropriately) as Pykimede, "highly intelligent." According to Alcidamas (also in the fourth century), Hesiod's opponent in the singing contest at Chalcis was Homer himself; Hesiod won because he spoke of works of peace rather than of war. Alcidamas also provided an account of the poet's death that offered a startling contrast to the poet's self-portrait in the poems. Hesiod repeatedly advises Perses about the need for law and justice, and warns him, with the story of Pandora as an example, against involvement with women; but in Alcidamas's account Hesiod was murdered in Locri (near Delphi) by two brothers because he had seduced their sister; his body was thrown into the sea. Thucydides knew a story that Hesiod had been warned by the Delphic oracle to avoid the grove of Nemean Zeus, but he mistakenly avoided Nemea in the Peloponnesus rather than the shrine of Nemean Zeus in Locri (3.95.3-5). Ephorus claimed that Hesiod's father left Cyme and emigrated to Boeotia because he had murdered a kinsman (70F100). Biographers seemed determined to make Hesiod's life, and especially the end of it, belie his own claims in his poetry of intelligence and integrity.

Although Homer says virtually nothing about himself, a whole mythology grew up about him, and we can get an idea of the kind of

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information the ancient "public," from the fifth century onward, wanted to know about their greatest poet. Homer led a life that accounted for his extensive knowledge of geography and also for his own modesty about his powers, which he expresses in the one extended first-person statement he makes in either poem, the introduction to the catalogue of ships (*Il.*2.487). Homer is a wandering beggar, as Odysseus pretends to be in the *Odyssey*; like the bard Demodocus in *Od.*8, he is blind. Biographers invented genealogies that make him at once extraordinary and debased. Aristotle says Homer's mother was made pregnant by "some divinity" during a festival in Ios; Ephorus says she was raped by her uncle in Cyme (*FGrHist* 70Fl). Homer is badly treated during his wanderings; he loses the contest to Hesiod and dies when he cannot answer a riddle about lice told to him by fisherboys. Only in biographies written in the Hellenistic Age and after do we find attempts to supply in Homer's life the kind of recognition he received throughout antiquity for his poetry. In a life that pretends to be by Herodotus of Halicarnassus, Homer's talent is recognized while he is young by the schoolteacher Phemius (the name of another bard in the *Odyssey*); he is befriended by a rich man in Chios and by townspeople throughout his life. We may sense in the biographies of the greatest Greek poet, Homer, some of the ambivalence the Greeks felt about their greatest hero, Heracles. For all his accomplishments, including victories over death in three different forms, Heracles is portrayed as a glutton and a buffoon; he spends longer in slavery than any other god or hero. Instead of dying in battle he is poisoned by a woman; Homer, too, dies as a consequence of being unable to exercise the mental powers that had served him well in life.

Historical reconstruction of the life of Pindar produced a dramatic change in that poet's character and had a devastating effect on the interpretation of his odes. When in the odes Pindar uses metaphors to describe his supremacy, the Hellenistic commentators interpreted them as political allusions to his competitors: a pair of crows chattering against an eagle are not creatures from a fable but become the rival poets Bacchylides and Simonides (*Sch. 01.*2.154b). A statement about what he has not done in an ode is read as an apology; asking a rhetorical question is interpreted as a sign of insecurity. Composing hymns is taken as evidence of piety. Biographers sought, if possible, to establish an event or fact that could explain statements that seemed ambivalent or irrelevant. Attempts of present-day biographers to find the real person behind a character in a novel or the psychological problem a writer is trying to solve through his work are somewhat more sophisticated versions of the same process.

Of the several cases where the ancient evidence allows us to see in detail how a first-person statement can be taken out of context and

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developed into biography, I will concentrate on a passage that helped show how Pindar came to be represented in his biography as a holy man. In his *Third Pythian Ode*, after speaking of what it is not possible to do for his patron Hieron, the poet says, "I will pray to the Mother whom girls sing to at night with Pan beside my door, holy goddess" (77–79). In context, this statement simply describes what is possible; it forms a conclusion to the unfilled wishes that precede it and leads to further examples of what human beings can do in times of loss and suffering. Ancient commentators not illogically took the passage as direct autobiographical information. They connected the references to the Mother and to Pan with Pindar's hymns. They understood "girls" (*korai*) to mean "(my) daughters" (139a). By the second or third century A.D., *korai* had acquired the names Protomache and Eumetis, who were mentioned in another poem along with one of the names given to Pindar's father or son, Daiphantus (F94c). By means of a similar process of recovery, the line "neither may I nor my son be called a just man" in Hesiod's *Works and Days* (270–1) produced the story that Hesiod raped a girl who became the mother of the poet Stesichorus, and the exhortation "work, Perses, *dion genos*" suggested that Dios was the name of Hesiod's father.

The words "beside my door" also elicited detailed explanation of Pindar's involvement with the cult of the Mother. Aristodemus, a pupil of the third-century Homeric scholar Aristarchus, provided a narrative about the poet's piety: "Pindar was giving a lesson to Olympichus the *aulos* player when there was a noise and flame on the mountain where they were practising. Pindar thought that he saw a stone statue of the Mother of the gods and Pan; the citizens of Thebes sent an inquiry to the Delphic oracle about what had happened, and the oracle confirmed that a shrine be established to the Mother of the Gods. The citizens were amazed that Pindar had anticipated the oracle and honored Pindar equally in the ritual to the goddess" (Sch.*Pyth*.3.137b/*FGrHist* 383F13). Aristodemus's account, at least in part, may be based on Pindar's (now lost) hymn to Demeter. Hymns often described epiphanies of gods. But where hymns concentrate on expressing the powers of the divinity they celebrate, Aristodemus's story concentrates more on human responses than on divinity, and fifth-century piety would have not allowed the original hymn to have mentioned the equal honor paid by the Thebans to Pindar himself. Since Pausanias in the second century A.D. gives a different account of the hymn's origin, the hymn itself could not have provided any definite indication of how the poet came to write it. Pausanias says Persephone (not Demeter) appeared to Pindar in a dream; Pindar wrote the song for her after his death; the poet recited it in a dream to an old woman relative, who wrote it down from memory.

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In outline, at least, Aristodemus's story has the characteristics of a Hellenistic narrative, especially in its emphasis on the role of ordinary people: Pindar's *aulos* student Olympichus and the people of Thebes. Names and details lend verisimilitude and interest. It is interesting that the imagined circumstances of performance are more carefully preserved by the commentators than the actual words of Pindar's hymn and that, in the story, human response becomes more important than praise of the goddess. The poet in the story no longer speaks with the authoritative voice of the poet in the ode; he is now simply a pious man who has seen a miracle and is respected by his fellow citizens not because of his skill but because the oracle confirmed that the miracle happened.

Aristodemus's story indicates that, by the third century, people respected external signs of recognition and wanted to know something about the daily life of the great men of the past. So Pindar acquires daughters who mourn for him when he dies (Vit.I. 3.11), gives music lessons, and has a house with a cult statue in his backyard. When Pausanias made his tour of Boeotia in the second century A.D., he was shown the ruins of Pindar's house at Thebes and the tablet on which Pindar's hymn to Ammon had been inscribed (ix.25.3,16.1). At Tanagra he saw a memorial depicting Corinna's victory over Pindar (ix.32.3). At Delphi in the temple of Apollo he saw the iron chair where Pindar was said to have composed his songs for the god (x.24.3). Of these relics, only Pindar's house is mentioned in his surviving poetry. These alleged possessions tell us no more about Pindar as an individual than Pindar's own first personal statements; each type of information is in some way exemplary: the poet as professional; the poet as hero; the poet as saint. There is, however, a progression over time from abstract to concrete, which is characteristic of popular historical reconstruction. Specific objects, such as a chair, replace Pindar's actual hymns in much the same way as a single day, the Fourth of July, represents the many different events that resulted in America's independence.

Robin G. Collingwood in his famous book *The Idea of History* says that the chief merit of Greco-Roman history writing is its humanism, and its chief defect, substantialism. By substantialism he meant the assumption that things did not change; that a man's or a city's character was fixed at birth; that the agencies or motivations (envy, hubris, etc.) that determine individual acts are consistent and universal. The Homeric scholia on Bellerophon's tablet (as we saw) offer a trivial example of substantialism: "It is impossible that the people who discovered every skill didn't know the alphabet." A poet's talent, like Homer's or Pindar's, is recognized when he is very young, because the poet's abilities are understood to have been consistent throughout his life;

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therefore, in the poets' biographies, little attention is paid to the question of their training and education, the very things modern biographers would most like to know about. Historical reconstruction is another aspect of substantialism; lives are made to conform to pre-established patterns; the past is made to resemble the present because writers do not take into consideration whether a word like *agora* changes its connotation from "speech" to "marketplace" or whether conditions of travel in the fifth century were significantly different from those of the more scientifically advanced Hellenistic Age.

Collingwood emphasized the effect of substantialist thinking on portrayal of character and causation; I hope that my few examples will also cause us to reconsider the very existence of acts, events, and dates. What were Solon's laws and reforms? Was Pindar really so pious? If we can assume that most biographies were composed on the same principles, can we really be so sure about other "facts" that we have long taken for granted? For example, modern accounts of Aeschylus's life and works stress that he was a patriot who fought against the Persians at Marathon. So, of course, did most able-bodied Athenian men, but the primary source of our information about Aeschylus's life and character is Athenian comedy, and in particular Aristophanes' *Frogs*. Aristophanes may have known something about Aeschylus's military service, but it also suited his purpose in the *Frogs* to portray Aeschylus as an old-fashioned militarist who believed in the value of martial training for the young, since in that way Aeschylus could represent ancient Athenian virtues against the moral decadence of the day, which Aristophanes portrays as embodied in the character of Euripides.

Aristophanes' characterization of Euripides in the *Frogs* had a profound influence on subsequent literary criticism, ancient and modern. Because Aristophanes makes Euripides responsible for the breakdown of everything from morality to traditional lyric meter, Euripides began to be represented in his biographies as an anti-establishment figure; it was assumed that he went off to Macedonia at the end of his life because of the hostility of the Athenian citizens. In modern times it has been suggested that his plays contain subtle criticisms of Athenian values: if gods appear from the machine at the end of his plays, it is assumed that they do so to demonstrate ironically the weakness of traditional religion. These notions have particular appeal because they enable us to feel superior to Euripides' contemporaries, in that we understand what he meant and they did not. But the only hard fact that we know about Euripides argues strongly against Aristophanes' characterization and the subsequent criticism it has influenced: only three playwrights were chosen each year by the magistrates to put on dramas in the competition at the Festival of Dionysus: the titles of ninety-two dramas of Euripides

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were known, more titles than are known of any poet except Sophocles. Euripides won fewer first prizes than Sophocles, but that he competed so often suggests that his message was understood and appreciated. If his gods (or men) seem evil and capricious, their characterization may have seemed to his audience accurate rather than ironic.

Sophocles, quite possibly because Aristophanes did not use him as a character in one of his comedies, gets rather more respectful treatment from his biographers. Both ancient and modern biographers have taken particular interest in accounts of his public service: a contemporary of Sophocles, Ion of Chios, records that Sophocles served as general in the Samian War of 441/440; his ancient Life says he was elected general again a few years later; an inscription listing state magistrates records that he served as state treasurer in 438. Here at last we may have some factual information. But what can we make of it? Significantly, the contemporary source, Ion of Chios, tells us nothing definite: he relates an anecdote that indicates that he (Ion) was interested in the relationship between Sophocles' composing poetry and his serving as general, but not in any serious way. In Ion's story (T75Radt), Sophocles uses an elaborate ruse to get a young slave boy to kiss him and then observes, "I am interested in strategy [*strategein*, "being a general"], gentlemen, although Pericles said I can write poetry, but don't understand strategy [*strategein*]; but now didn't that strategy of mine work out perfectly?" The anecdote gives Sophocles more credit for his wit than for his success in public office: "He said and did many things cleverly when he was drinking, but in political matters he was no more clever or persuasive than any other Athenian aristocrat." Ion may have been a contemporary of Sophocles, but that does not necessarily mean that he took down an exact transcript of the dinner party conversation. The anecdote rather seems structured to make a general point about Sophocles' character in some larger context now unfortunately lost. Even Thucydides expected his audience to accept "what they ought to have said" as a substitute for what they actually said (i.22.1).

By the Hellenistic Age, as we might suspect from Aristodemus's story about Pindar's house, the connection between Sophocles' generalship and his writing was made more explicit. The third-century-B.C. scholar Aristophanes of Byzantium, who also edited Homer, notes in his hypothesis to Sophocles' *Antigone* that "Sophocles was judged worthy of generalship because of the high reputation he had won from having put on the *Antigone*" (T 25). This suggests that the *Antigone* was put on a year or two before 441/440; Aristophanes might possibly have found information about the date of the play from chronological data in Callimachus's *Catalogues* in the Library at Alexandria: Aristotle himself had recorded the lists (*didaskaliai*) of yearly winners of the dramatic

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competitions. But Aristophanes might also have been merely making an inference. A contemporary of Callimachus, the biographer Satyrus, seems to have believed in a much later date for the play, 406/405 B.C. He says that Sophocles choked to death while reciting a passage from the *Antigone* (he was either acting in or training actors for the performance); according to another anecdote, he died of joy after the recitation when he heard that he had been proclaimed victor (Vit.14). The coexistence of these conflicting stories suggests that in the third century there was no fixed information available about the date of the *Antigone*. But since it was probably Sophocles' most famous play, biographers wished to give some specific account of it. The subject matter of the play suggested that it was performed at the time of a political crisis. Aristophanes picked the Samian revolt, which challenged the authority of the Athenian empire; Satyrus also chose the time of Sophocles' death as not long before Athens was defeated and her empire destroyed in the Peloponnesian War. It is conceivable that Sophocles could have written some portion of the *Antigone* as a commentary on a particular event, but in practice, fifth-century dramas describe the human condition; they were not pamphlets responding to specific political situations. Aeschylus's *Persians*, produced eight years after the defeat of the Persian navy at Salamis, portrayed the dangers of hubris; Herodotus finished his books about the defeat of the Persians as Athens was developing her own empire. Euripides' *Trojan Women* was apparently produced in 415, the year that Athens put down the Melian rebellion and prepared her expedition against Sicily; but the general issue of revenge against dissident allies had already been raised by the Mytilenean revolt of 427, at the very beginning of the war.

But it would be wrong to blame Aristophanes of Byzantium for assuming that the *Antigone* had something to do with Sophocles' generalship, or Aristodemus for thinking that Pindar actually had a shrine of Demeter near his house. Even if they had tried, where (with few exceptions), other than in their imaginations, might they have found such information? Ancient poets only spoke about themselves when it suited their purposes; thus a poet like Pindar might often speak about his attitude toward a victor but virtually never about his own private life. Solon seems to have written at length about his accomplishments as an archon, but in a more general and ethical way than later biographers would lead us to believe. In offering a fuller account, biographers were attempting to state for their contemporaries the significance of the poet's achievement in terms that had relevance for them; so in his biography Homer is portrayed as being able to communicate with all sorts of people because he remained throughout antiquity the most widely read poet; pretending that his biography was written by Herodotus is a means of

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indicating that it was based on direct inquiry and has some exemplary significance.

By nature, such historical reconstruction can be accurate (in our sense) only when it describes the period in which it was written. In characterizing the disastrous Athenian expedition to Sicily in the narrative pattern of an epic or tragedy, Thucydides placed special emphasis on events and speeches that in a modern account would get far less attention. But his version represents more accurately than any narrative we could now write how his contemporaries in Athens understood what had happened to them. And because he was able to gather information from eyewitnesses and did not need to rely primarily on conjecture to construct a coherent narrative, he was able to provide what we would call a history of the events of his day and to distinguish clearly those events from occurrences in the more remote past.

Pocock observes that only in the Renaissance did scholars become fully capable of describing the past in terms appropriate to itself, rather than to the writer or to his society. Of course no historian, no matter how careful, can completely escape the tendency to historicize; I would also suggest that the desire to see the past in terms of the present is as basic a human characteristic as relying on metaphor or symbol. The purpose of historicization can sometimes be laudable: presumably patriotism inspired the creation of an inscription in Troezen in the late fourth or early third century that represents itself as a decree of 480 B.C. mentioned by Herodotus of the Athenian leader Themistocles. The form and language of the inscription have many fourth-century features, and the Greek courage and unity that the inscription commemorates were also badly needed when the Greeks tried to revolt against Macedonian rule after Alexander's death. Then there is the bronze tablet that commemorates Sir Francis Drake's landing on the coast of California; its metal alloy and orthography betray it as a forgery. Like the Themistocles decree, the Drake tablet testifies to the popular appeal of local heroic achievement; without the stamp of personality, achievements of any kind, literary or military, lose much of their interest and become hard to understand and to describe.

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Through Bifocals

Donald Davie

This you have heard before;
Have heard to the point where it serves
Only to numb, of the insult
Historical markers invite
With such inconsequence: Battle
Of Murfreesboro, of Franklin . . .

Two hours ago a boom
And a brief billow of pink
Dust was how a small
Recalcitrant bluff was cleared for
"A Planned Community in
The Williamsburg Manner."

Earthmovers on that hillside
Lie still now, and a jiggle
Of off-and-on orange flashes
Seemed, when I looked over there
Through reading glasses, a pulse
Of pain in the pink earth's wound.

My trustier bifocals
See lights atop the blazon,
Red on yellow, of
"Country Store" in this

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Uncomplaining tract of
Tennessee disembowelled.

Among the supposedly fine
Arts, one at least has weaseled
Out of the tatterdemalion
Rear guard, and put its trust in
The double focus: "plan"
Enforced; then (optional) "manner."

Architects! co-workers
With Louis Sullivan once, you
Wink at as foolishly "dire"
My warning to your consumers:
The wider the range of manners,
The more inhumane the enforcement.

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TEACHING

Perry Miller

KENNETH S. LYNN

Of all the books from Perry Miller's library that now are housed in my own, none are of greater interest to me than two by Miller's fellow teacher of American literature at Harvard during the 1930s and 1940s, F. O. Matthiessen. Much of my fascination with these volumes has to do with the inscriptions they contain. "Perry—You alleged that you wanted to look up a sentence in this book," Matthiessen sarcastically wrote on the flyleaf of *Translation: An Elizabethan Art* (1931). "Perhaps you can use the rest for kindling." The author who in May 1941 gave Miller and his wife a copy of *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* was equally full of resentment: "For Perry and Betty with much gratitude, though the former has latterly indicated that he finds little value in the method employed in these pages."

Short-tempered and fiercely combative, Matthiessen found it difficult to accept disappointment in any sort of endeavor he undertook; a mere defeat for his side in a volleyball game could affect his mood for hours. Yet Matthiessen was not so competitive that he could not be generous. Both publicly and privately, he saluted Miller's *New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (1939) as "monumental." Not even *American Renaissance* earned him a comparable compliment in return. Although Miller expressed admiration for the book's literary sensitivity, he deplored its lack of historical consciousness. As soon as he had finished with the Puritans, he informed the seething Matthiessen, he would himself write a proper book about the age of Emerson and Whitman.

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In his need to disparage the achievements of a gifted rival, Miller resembled Hemingway, as he likewise did in his extraordinary capacity for painstaking work, his fondness for hard liquor and complaisant women, and his enthrallment with the excitements of war, as well as in the fact that he was the son of a doctor and grew up in the Chicago neighborhood of Austin, just across Austin Boulevard from suburban Oak Park, where the young Ernest Miller Hemingway lived. As observed from the back of a lecture hall, Miller also looked like Hemingway, and never more so than in 1946 when he had just returned to Harvard after three Hemingwayesque years as an army officer in the European theater of operations. With his prematurely white hair, metal-rimmed glasses, and imposing chest, the forty-one-year-old professor reminded me very strongly of the forty-seven-year-old novelist—or was I fooled into seeing double simply because of Miller's success in persuading his postwar students that he, like Hemingway, was an all-knowing "Mr. Papa"? (Miller and Hemingway met only once: in an apple orchard on the edge of the French village of Écouché near Argentan on August 18, 1944, seven days before the liberation of Paris. Miller was attached at the time to General Leclerc's French Second Armored Division, which had its headquarters in Écouché. Along with Helen Kirkpatrick of the *Chicago Daily News*, the novelist Irwin Shaw, the film star Claude Dauphin, General de Gaulle's aide Elizabeth de Miribelle, and a number of other people, Miller and Hemingway had lunch together, and then went their separate ways toward Paris.)

To dramatize his paternal authority, Miller began almost all of the upper-level lecture courses and graduate seminars he offered in the late 1940s by instilling in the students who signed up for them a mortal fear of his

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high standards. At the first meeting, for instance, of a course on American romanticism—which he gave in the summer of 1946 as preparation for the still-distant day when he would write the book that would make the world forget *American Renaissance*—he began the class with an explanation of the reading list. The thirty-odd titles on the list to which an asterisk was affixed represented the required reading, he announced. Undergraduates who were aiming for nothing higher than a gentleman's C would predictably confine their reading to the required items. Graduate students, however, plus all undergraduates who were "seriously interested in the life of the American mind," would, of course, want to go beyond the minimum and read "most or all" of the dozens of other novels, essays, plays, and orations whose titles he had also included on the list. Familiarity with *Moby-Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter* was presumed, and students who had not yet read these basic works—alas, I was one of them—would have to do so in their spare time. At this point, the faint of heart fled the room, while the rest of us remained to pray that Miller had to be kidding.

His resort to scare tactics, however, was the least of the reasons why students in the postwar period held him in awe. From the time of his return to Harvard to the end of the first half of the 1950s, Miller's scholarly output was no less impressive than it had been in the 1930s, when virtually everything he had published had served to widen the horizons of American history. Back to back in 1949 and 1950, he produced a profound and eloquent biography of Jonathan Edwards and a superb anthology of transcendentalist writing. In 1953, his supreme achievement appeared: *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, the massively detailed, beautifully orchestrated second volume of his history of the Puritans. Brilliant essays, such as "The Shaping of the American Character," "The Insecurity of Nature," "The Location of American Religious Freedom," "Emersonian Genius and the American Democracy," "Melville and Transcendentalism," and "The Romantic Dilemma in American Nationalism and the Concept of Nature," also flowed from his typewriter during this period.

Yet while he maintained a breathtaking pace as a scholar, his commitment to the classroom never faltered, partly because Miller was convinced that good teaching and good scholarship reinforced one another, and partly because he had once been an actor and had never lost his craving for the attention of an audience. Through courses that ranged from a general-education survey of the classics of the Christian tradition to a graduate seminar on post–Civil War American thought, he sought to bring a very wide spectrum of students within hearing of his husky, compelling voice.

The emphasis in Miller's courses was on ideas, which he generally dealt with—even in courses designed for sophomores—at quite a high level of philosophical difficulty. At the same time, he rescued his analyses from bloodless abstraction by implicating them in dramas of human conflict, which he proceeded to describe in startlingly emotional terms. Thus in his account of the transcendentalists' rebellion against their elders, he characterized their refusal to accept either John Locke's sensationalism or the Scottish philosophy of common sense as an "exasperated rejection," as an "explosion of resentment," as a "desperate epistemological quest" in which young men who "had been born, in Emerson's words, with knives in their brains" were "driven" to find their social, literary, and religious values within themselves; in time, the "tremors" set off by their "passionate revolution" were felt throughout the entire culture.

No other literary or intellectual historian of the late 1940s and early 1950s possessed as penetrating an understanding of the American mind as Miller did. From Van Wyck Brooks to Merle Curti and Henry Steele Commager, the leading historians of the period stuck to the surfaces of their subjects. Miller, though, was as distrustful of appearances as were Hawthorne and Melville. What he looked for was the play within the play—the hidden passion, the secret guilt, the underlying anxiety. If the master preached an insistent lesson, it was that things were never as they seemed:

> The reader may object that I am talking nonsense. This was the expanding, prospering, booming America of the 1840s; here, if ever in the annals of man, was an era of optimism, with a vision of limitless possibilities, with faith in a boundless future. . . . Surely this society was not wracked by a

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secret, hidden horror that its gigantic exertion would end only in some nightmare of debauchery called "civilization"?

. . . It would not be difficult to show how widespread, even though covert, was this apprehension of doom in the America of Jackson and Polk. Of course it was so elaborately masked, so concertedly disguised, that one may study the epoch for a long time without detecting it. Yet it is there, at the heart—at what may be called the secret heart—of the best thought and expression the country could produce.

If, however, things were never as they seemed, why then did those of us who were Miller's students never think to question whether our exorbitantly demanding, exhaustively knowledgeable, surpassingly brilliant professor was actually as self-confident as he wanted us to believe he was? We had no trouble in spotting the insecurities Hemingway was attempting to hide behind his fatherly facade, but we accepted Miller's "Mr. Papa" act at face value. Consequently, when Miller spoke of America's horror that its "gigantic exertion" was heading toward "some nightmare of debauchery," it did not occur to us to wonder whether the historical intuition that had enabled him to reach that astonishing conclusion might have been nurtured on the horror that the gigantic exertion of a single career might also end in debauchery. Sitting in his classroom, we were utterly dazzled by the revelations of this intellectual magician—and as we paid homage to his performances with thunderous ovations, we failed to ask ourselves why he was so obsessed with such words as "covert," "secret," and "masked."

One may study a man for a long time without detecting his disguises. Even after I had taken my Ph.D. and been invited to become Miller's colleague, even after the two of us had given a course together for years, even after my wife and I had become close friends of both Miller and his wife and had been drawn into the tragedy of his slow, then swift, decline, I did not realize how many of his direct statements about his life were bogus. Whether he was boasting to friends in private about having fathered a child in Europe during the war, or asserting in print that he found his intellectual mission in life while unloading oil drums on the banks of the Congo River, he kept up a front that was mainly false. Yet at the same time that Miller lied, he told the truth, sometimes in spite of himself. As D. H. Lawrence remarked of the author of *The Scarlet Letter,* Miller countered autobiographical falsehoods with "the impeccable truth of his art speech." In his scholarship and in his criticism, he talked, in code, about the man he really was.

Take, for instance, his Sinclair Lewis memoir. Miller and his wife first met the novelist in the fall of 1949, on board a transatlantic liner. Lewis was en route to Italy, while his new acquaintances were headed for Leiden, where Miller would occupy a special chair at the university. The Millers saw a good deal of Lewis during their year on the Continent, first in Holland, then in Italy, finally in Switzerland. A few months after their return to the United States, they received word that Lewis had died in Rome. Setting aside all other obligations, Miller at once composed a memoir for the *Atlantic Monthly* under the title, "The Incorruptible Sinclair Lewis." The piece has a haunting quality, and no wonder, for its elegiac tributes are suffused with prophetic dread.

Miller's Lewis is a prodigiously gifted midwestern writer whose glory days are behind him. Following his "five triumphs of the 1920s," the novelist had produced many other books, but the materials of his art had proved to be too profuse for him to handle. "All this immense America had to be poured through him; there was too much of it, and finally he took merely to reporting it, as Whitman, when his vitality flagged, catalogued it."

Faced with this situation, Lewis had seen no reason to heed his physician's increasingly stern warnings that he must stay away from alcohol. At the time of the Millers' visit to his Florentine villa, he was guzzling red wine every morning, and by afternoon had "generally succeeded in knocking himself out." Although other witnesses have declared that Lewis at the end of his life had sunk into a depression, Miller refused to refer to his friend's condition by a name that connoted helplessness. "He was not drinking because he was miserable and wanted solace; neither was he what you would call a drunkard. He was no disenchanted, alcoholic Scott Fitzgerald, drinking compulsively." No, Red Lewis was like a dying lion, roaring his "last defiance from a cave in the rocks. . . . There may not have been much joy in what Red was

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doing, but there was still plenty of defiance."

Not long before writing the Lewis memoir, Miller had announced to a group of students that within the next year and a half he would finish the manuscript of the second volume of *The New England Mind*, and that as soon as it was done he would begin work on his study of the age of Emerson and Whitman. He had been waiting to write that book for a long time, he said. But he wasn't looking forward to it quite as eagerly as he pretended. In his secret heart—as Miller long ago taught me to say—in the heart he surreptitiously bared in the Lewis memoir, he had developed a vivid fear that the nineteenth-century materials he would have to pour through himself might be too much for him to handle. If that proved to be the case, how would he respond? The Lewis memoir leaves no doubt that Miller already knew the answer. By drinking himself to death. But how would posterity regard such a man? Would he be thought of as a helpless failure who could not even control his thirst for booze? Not by people who really understood him. They would remember him rather as a man who had done things his way to the very end, like a dying lion roaring his last defiance from a cave in the rocks.

The memoirist also talked about the beginning years of Lewis's career in a way that shed light on his own. The memoir emphasizes that from childhood onward, Lewis had had a genius for spinning yarns; he could easily have earned a comfortable living writing stories for magazines—in fact, before *Main Street* he had done exactly that. He might well have become another Hervey Allen or Kenneth Roberts. What kept him from being just another storyteller was not something more sophisticated in him—not any doctrinal adherence to, or even apprehension of, the tenets of realism or naturalism—but

> something more primitive. The scrupulous documentation was the working of a conscience. This organ does not operate so strenuously in easy living or in facile writing; it becomes tormenting only when there is some deep psychic dislocation, some wrong done—or some hurt felt.

Miller cast the last sentence of that arresting analysis in general terms because he meant the whole of it to apply to more than one person. The documentary impulse in Miller's work as well as in Lewis's had originated, not in some sophisticated realm of doctrine, but in the primitive realm of psychic dislocation.

Miller was a Chicagoan by birth, a New Englander by ancestry. His mother, a strong-willed Yankee, came from Wallingford, Vermont, as did the parents of his somewhat unworldly father. In the fall of 1922, after graduating from Austin High School, the seventeen-year-old Miller enrolled at the University of Chicago. He was not happy there. Intellectually gifted but emotionally restless, he was intensely jealous of his older contemporaries who had fought in France in the First World War. The nearby presence of his parents, with their New England ideas of right and wrong, constituted another source of frustration for an adolescent whose imagination had been fired by the iconoclastic books and Bohemian attitudes of the recently concluded Chicago Renaissance. With growing impatience, Miller stayed on at the university until the end of his freshman year, then dropped out and left the city in quest of unmediated experience.

His first stop was Colorado, where he rejoiced in the spectacular scenery and the company of hoboes and IWWs. When those pleasures palled, he moved on to Greenwich Village. Here he wrote "true-confession" stories for pulp magazines and picked up an occasional part in a play, including a walk-on role in the original production of Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*. Yet if life in the Village had its rewards, it was also lonely and expensive. In the wake, therefore, of his final appearance in *Desire*, Miller set out to reenact the playwright's romantic adventures as a merchant seaman. In the course of the next two years he saw Mexico, the Mediterranean, and the Belgian Congo in this way, and it was while unloading oil drums in a Congo port town that he experienced a "vision," as he later insisted in the preface to *Errand Into the Wilderness* (1956), a collection of his early essays. This vision demanded of him that he spend his life expounding the meaning of American civilization. Just as it was "given to Edward Gibbon to sit disconsolate amid the ruins of the Capitol at Rome, and to have thrust upon him the 'laborious work' of *The Decline and Fall*," the *Errand* preface continues, so "it was given to me, equally disconsolate on the edge of a jungle of central Africa,

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to have thrust upon me the mission of expounding what I took to be the innermost propulsion of the United States."

The language reverberates, but very little is revealed, either in the comparison to Gibbon or elsewhere in the preface. Reluctant as always to discuss his vulnerabilities, Miller does not offer any reasons for the young sailor's disconsolate mood, although a passing reference to his African adventures as "tawdry" and another to the "security" of the University of Chicago are inadvertently suggestive. Yet in spite of the fact that I have no private information at my disposal, I think it is possible to figure out what was on the sailor's mind. In my opinion, the twenty-one-year-old Miller was confronted with the realization that his life of adventure had collapsed into an unmanageable chaos. Within him lay a tangle of alarmingly undisciplined emotions, while around him loomed a wilderness that was even more appalling. Gibbon in Rome was borne down by the weight of history, but Miller in Africa felt himself to be outside of history. Further contributing to the sailor's demoralization, I believe, were searing feelings of guilt. Although thousands of miles lay between him and the parents against whose values he had rebelled, he still carried enough of their New England morality in his baggage to feel deeply troubled by their disappointment in him.

Finally, I believe that Miller did not experience a revelation in Africa of what his life's work must be; in my view, the only knowledge of which he was certain was that he had to get out of that terrible place and return to the structured world of the University of Chicago. The Congo, as I see it, represented a decisive moment for Miller, but not in the way he would later claim. It was not a Gibbonian vision of vocation, but an existential fear of the void that was thrust upon him amid the oil drums.

Upon finishing college, Miller enrolled as a graduate student at Chicago. Not long thereafter, he decided to concentrate his scholarly attention on New England Puritanism, in spite of the warning of one or two of his instructors that the field was exhausted, that all the wheat had long since been winnowed. For the rest of his life, Miller was much given to protesting that his decision had in no sense represented a "personal predilection." He had only wished, he said, to begin his study of America at the beginning. It was in Virginia, however, not in New England, that American history had begun. Miller skipped over the first chapter and started with New England because his whole life had predestined him to write about his heritage.

In "The Augustinian Strain of Piety," the famous first chapter of the first volume of *The New England Mind*, Miller states that "such a chapter as I am now attempting could never have been written by any true Puritan, for I am seeking to delineate the inner core of Puritan sensibility apart from the dialectic and the doctrine." He might have added that the chapter could also not have been written by any previous authority on New England Puritanism, not even by Kenneth B. Murdock or Samuel Eliot Morison, the two highly knowledgeable Bostonians who were Miller's senior colleagues in colonial studies at Harvard. That it remained for an outsider from the Middle West to write "The Augustinian Strain" was partly because no scholar before him had had the patience to read every document published in New England in the seventeenth century. But Miller's achievement also derived from his special sensitivity to Augustinian themes. First aroused, as I have argued, by what happened to him in Africa, Miller's existentialism was transformed from a raw emotion into a philosophical position in the course of a decade and a half of intensive reading. Despite his boisterous characterization of himself as a "goddam atheist," he was not merely expressing the sensibility of the Puritans when he said of them that they were haunted by the feeling that "man is not at home within the universe," or that they were aware that "the natural man, standing alone in the universe, is not only minute and insignificant, but completely out of touch with both justice and beauty," or that they yearned for "a world that could be known and understood." He was giving voice to his own anguish as well.

Miller's account of their emotional consciousness made the Puritans seem like his contemporaries. In discussing their system of ideas, however, he made it abundantly clear that the Puritans belonged to a very different world. Yet for all its objectivity, Miller's brilliant anatomization of the Puritan system's doctrine of the covenant and of its ingeniously

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related borrowings from humanism, scholasticism, and the logic of Petrus Ramus still made room for subjective recognitions. Underneath all the differences between the New England mind and his own lay a fundamental similarity. "However tortuous or suspect might be their logic, even when their writings achieved a subtlety that verges upon the specious, they held firm their grip upon this great and revolutionary idea, that no force but the will of man can bring order out of the chaos of human depravity." Those words apply to Miller's pattern-making mentality as forcibly as they do to the Puritans'.

They also apply to Miller the man. The demonic elements in his personality, which had been in command of his life between his nineteenth and twenty-second years, were subsequently kept at bay by a force of will, a discipline of work. Nevertheless, the bourbon-soaked benders he occasionally went on in the 1930s and the scuffle he had with Delmore Schwartz in the late 1940s over the affections of a younger woman whom he and the poet had both been dating sufficed to raise the question of what would happen to him if he ever were confronted with a crisis in his scholarship.

The first signal that a crisis was imminent was the Sinclair Lewis memoir. Two years later, the second volume of *The New England Mind* sent out a second and far stronger signal via its vehement emphasis on themes of intellectual alarm and moral corruption. Paradoxically, Miller did not respond to his forebodings of failure by modifying the project he was about to undertake. Instead, he vastly enlarged it, much to the distress of his far more realistic wife. Instead of aiming at the ambitious but largely literary history he had tauntingly described to Matthiessen, he now proposed to recreate the entire intellectual universe of romantic America, from the end of the Revolution to the beginning of the Civil War. Religion, science, technology, law, education, political economics, philosophy—all these topics and more would be encompassed by his genius. Not even Captain Ahab entertained more extravagant fantasies.

Aside from the wonderfully astute editorial help he had always counted on receiving from his wife, Miller was accustomed to working alone. In this case, however, he decided to hire a research assistant, a young man of phenomenal energy. Miller's wife bitterly fought the decision, at first because she did not care for the young man's manners, but in the long run because she saw how eager he was to aid and abet Miller's grandiosity. "Every time he brings you another shoe box full of note cards," she warned her husband, "he makes your book less feasible." Unfortunately, Miller refused to listen to her, and the pile of shoe boxes continued to mount.

One of the early by-products of Miller's overarching effort was *The Raven and the Whale* (1956), an account of the wars of the New York literati in the 1840s and 1850s. "I don't like it," Miller's wife bluntly told him. Sheepishly agreeing that she was right, Miller thereafter referred to the unfortunate volume as "a comic book." Such was his resilience, though, that in spite of the wounds he was accumulating, the old lion was still capable of producing marvelous essays. *The Raven and the Whale* may have been a failure, but in 1958 he brought out a long introduction to a newly discovered journal of Henry Thoreau that constitutes the most discerning psychological assessment of the author in all of Thoreauvian criticism. And among the fragments of the tragically incomplete manuscript on American romanticism that was found among Miller's papers after his death was an extensive section called "The Evangelical Basis," which illustrated once again that when it came to writing about American Protestantism, Miller was in a class by himself. The mind of America's most eminent historian since Henry Adams did not go down to defeat without a titanic struggle.

The great thing is to last and get your work done, Hemingway wrote in *Death in the Afternoon*. Thirty years later, in the early summer of 1961, a novelist who could no longer do his work aimed a double-barreled shotgun at himself and blew his head off. In his classes on American literature, Miller likened the impact of the death of Hemingway on America to the extraordinary grief that had overcome many nineteenth-century Americans upon learning of the death of Byron. What Miller neglected to acknowledge was his own deeply shaken reaction to the passing of a writer in whose life and work he had always seen so much of himself.

With Hemingway's suicide, Miller's determination to destroy himself entered its cli-

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mactic phase. In the course of the next two and a half years, his despairing wife, after attempting to take her own life, would banish him from their home, and Miller would take up residence in the Harvard dormitory where he would die unattended on December 9, 1963, in his fifty-ninth year. My own last encounter with him had occurred the previous summer, shortly before my departure for a year in Spain. The scene of our meeting was a room in a Boston hospital, in which Miller, at his doctor's insistence, was "drying out." The hour we spent together was a tranquil one, disturbed only by my discovery, in a satchel in the closet, of a bottle of Bellows Club bourbon.

Four years after Miller's death, a professor of colonial American history remarked to me that Miller "had never had any students." I got the message. The professor considered himself to be a more important historian than Miller, and one of the grounds for his belief was that a great many of the graduate students who had written their dissertations with him had sought to extend the findings in his own work, whereas next to none of the students whose dissertations had been directed by Miller could be said to belong to a Miller "school." Although I did not agree with the self-congratulatory implications of his remark, the professor had a point about Miller. He was definitely not at his best as a dissertation director—which is one of the reasons why a number of graduate students of my time at Harvard, myself included, preferred the supervision of other professors. With very few exceptions, the dissertation writers who worked with Miller were left to their own devices; they could count on only minimal help from him with stylistic matters, or in solving evidentiary problems, or in avoiding the excesses of argumentative zeal. As for founding a "school," Miller was remarkably uninterested in doing so.

Is a teacher great if he does not reproduce himself? If the answer is no, then Miller was not a great teacher. Such a conclusion, however, does not reckon with his achievements as a lecturer. Across two decades, Miller and Matthiessen formed one of the most electrifying pedagogical combinations in modern Harvard's history, and in the thirteen years of life that were left to Miller after Matthiessen's suicide in 1950, his lectures continued to prompt uncountable numbers of Harvard and Radcliffe undergraduates into majoring in English or in American history and literature so that they could steep themselves in the subjects he taught. Was Miller a great teacher? Most assuredly, he was.

His outgoing temperament, hearty humor, and irreverent wit also made him a hit with students outside the classroom. Whether he was analyzing the pennant chances of the Boston Red Sox or bemoaning the ostentatious religiosity of Harvard's new president ("There's too goddam much pietistic fallout around here," he once told Nate Pusey in the presidential office), Miller's conversation was as instructive as it was amusing. There was, moreover, a sweetness in Miller that came out most strongly in his informal relations with students. For in spite of his repeated assertion that "Betty and I decided to have books instead of children," he and his wife had very much wanted to have a family, and when that proved impossible, they both lavished their frustrated parental affection upon a host of younger friends. Like other students who were invited to the parties they gave after the war, I loved the Millers, and was loved in return.

During the years in which Miller and I together taught the survey course in American literature, my regard for him deepened, and I discovered new dimensions of his kindness and generosity. If I wanted to lecture on a certain author and not on another, he never failed to defer to my preference; and more often than not, I prevailed as well on those occasions when we disagreed about the quality of a student's exam. Thus when an older English department colleague asked me one day how I was getting along with Miller, I told him that I could not imagine a more pleasant association. "You're lucky you've not had to deal with the real Perry," he rejoined. To which I at once replied—not yet fully knowing what I meant—that the reality of Perry Miller was a complicated question.

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Slipping

JANE O. WAYNE

They say you're slipping.
While you sleep your hair changes color.

For more than sixty years
you argued with the mirror,

over the same wash basin
berated cold pipes to bring warm water.

Always in a hurry,
stirring soup, blowing clouds from a spoon,

until your knife comes down to the bare plate.
Chairs back away from the table

and right before your eyes, the house empties
the way an old dog loses teeth.

Today you stare
with the houseplant out the window.

Leaves are covering your lawn,
but you wear your hands in your pockets,

fingers stiff and pale
as the leftover stalks on the hydrangea.

When a plane soars by
you listen to the panes rattle.

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Mark Pattison

ANTHONY GRAFTON

Mark Pattison's name calls to mind a whole lost world of Victorian learning. Its locales ranged widely in character and location: from the great domed reading room of the British Museum, lined with its hundreds of calf-bound books, to James Murray's cramped iron Scriptorium, lined with its thousands of paper slips bearing quotations. But its inhabitants were more uniform: the bald, bearded, energetic men of letters who founded literary societies, created workingmen's colleges, taught young women to row, edited arcane texts, and wrote essays for the common reader more learned than most of what appears in modern scholarly journals. We still batten upon the rich fruits of their industry: the *New English Dictionary*, the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

Pattison occupies a peculiar niche in this gallery of sages. He was and remains the best-known Victorian defender of German culture and scholarship. Mrs. Humphry Ward's *Recollections* offers a characteristic glimpse of him talking in his library with his friend Ingram Bywater, "as they poured scorn on Oxford scholarship, or the lack of it, and on the ideals of Balliol, which aimed at turning out public officials, as compared with the researching ideals of the German universities, which seemed to the Rector the only ideals worth calling academic." One can get to know Pattison better by hunting him out in his natural habitat—the long and close-packed columns of *The Academy*, that engaging fortnightly which he helped to found, in which summaries of Richard Wagner's musicological views, reports of Heinrich Schliemann's archaeological discoveries, and descriptions of new-style pianos, meant to be played with the feet, nestle invitingly side by side. Pattison appears on one page speaking in public at the Freemasons' Hall, arguing with T. H. Huxley, A. H. Sayce, Robinson Ellis, and Ray Lankester about "the low state of learning and science in the two older universities." He reappears elsewhere, summarizing recent research on the manuscript tradition of the *Characters* of Theophrastus, and castigating the German and English editors who rearranged the text as their fancy rather than the manuscript evidence dictated. He pops up on yet another page out-Teutonizing the Teutons in a review of Lucian Müller's *History of Classical Philology in the Netherlands* (1869). In this German book, Pattison complains, "We miss . . . the usual German virtue—*Gründlichkeit*."

This is the Mr. Casaubon long familiar from *Middlemarch* and academic folklore—the dry and caustic scholar who, as John Morley recalled, "was supposed to combine boundless erudition with an impenetrable misanthropy." An anecdote printed just after his death by an admirer gives an idea of his relations with disciples:

> [Pattison] suggested that I should edit [John] Selden's *Table Talk*. The preparation was to be, first to get the contents practically by heart, then to read the whole printed literature of Selden's day, and of the generation before him. In twenty years he promised me that I should be prepared for the

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work. He put the thing before me in so unattractive a way that I never did it or anything else worth doing. I consider the ruin of my misspent life very largely due to that conversation.

One begins to understand just how Pattison's learned wife managed to combine loathing for his body (which she could not bear to touch), disgust for his character ("His screams of pain and terror," she wrote as he lay dying, "were heard throughout the house. The moral misery is awful"), and boundless admiration for his learning and intellect.

I shall not try to penetrate the recesses of Pattison's mind and sensibility. V. H. H. Green and John Sparrow have done so with a learning and insight that no non-Oxonian could match. My concern is not Pattison the Oxford character but Pattison the scholar, who is still read as an authority on two related subjects: the development of classical scholarship after the Renaissance and the transformation of the German universities after the French Revolution. While toiling in Pattison's preferred fields of study, I have had occasion to sample his work, to test it against his sources, and to compare it with that of his contemporaries. The results have been disquieting. Repeated encounters with his inability to quote a document accurately, his ineptitude at establishing dates, and his incompetence at summarizing plain German accurately in English have led me to wonder whether he deserves the authority he still enjoys in the English-speaking world. This essay—which rests on soundings in Pattison's unpublished notebooks and correspondence in the Bodleian Library as well as upon a systematic reading of his published work—is meant to subject Pattison's scholarship to something of the same critical scrutiny that his character has often received.

It is curious that Pattison became so closely identified with the quintessentially modern mental life of the German universities. His roots lay deep in rural England—in Wensleydale, where he was born in 1813. The son of an eccentric clergyman, he knew firsthand as a child the world of crowded trout streams and unspoiled coaching inns that one reads of in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. He went up to Oxford ignorant of the refinements of Greek and Latin and the elements of etiquette. At university he read widely and mastered the canons of upper-class civility. But he took only a second in the schools, and became a fellow of Lincoln College only thanks to the traditional system by which eligibility to compete for certain fellowships was restricted to natives of single counties.

Pattison's mental life, as it developed during the 1830s, was as limited as his academic achievements were modest. It centered on Newman and the Tractarian movement. Pattison joined in the efforts of Newman's journal, *The British Critic*, to reconstruct the doctrines and practices of the true Catholic church of medieval England. He translated part of Thomas Aquinas's vast anthology of patristic exegesis, the *Catena Aurea*, and wrote saints' lives. In the process he became a habitué of the Bodleian and the leading expert in Oxford in out-of-the-way areas of patristic and medieval scholarship.

What Pattison seems not to have been concerned with in the 1830s and 1840s were the subjects that would inspire his best essays. Trinity College, Cambridge, and the new University of London had influential members who could read academic German with ease and even translate it into literate English with facility. B. G. Niebuhr's *History of Rome*, Karl Otfried Müller's *Dissertations* on the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, and other characteristic products of the Historical School were published in English versions and assimilated into the Cambridge curriculum. The Cambridge classical journals, the *Museum Criticum* in the second decade of the nineteenth century and the *Philological Museum* in the fourth, carried elaborate articles on the history of scholarship and informative reports on the doings of the Germans. They published Latin and English treatises by Böckh and Savigny—though, being English, they also published imaginary conversations among the ancients by Walter Savage Landor. Rumors of these German discoveries—and of the English discovery of Germany—reached Oxford as well as Cambridge. Thanks to the work of Thomas Arnold and other liberal Anglicans, the young Pattison was not allowed to confine his study of Roman history to reading the Roman historian Livy: "One was expected at that time to know something of Niebuhr's views." But neither Pattison nor his teachers realized that the new German schol-

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arship was raising a challenge to the whole Oxford curriculum. And Niebuhr's complex book was less an inspiration than a nightmare to Pattison, who tried to read it rather than the potted summaries students normally used, and found it "a quagmire, a Serbonic gulf, in which I was swallowed up."

Even as a college tutor Pattison kept his attention fixed on a narrow range of tasks and a parochial set of ideas. Since the beginning of the century, the best Oxford tutors had been trying to give the university a serious curriculum and a responsible teaching staff. They had devised a new curriculum, instituted a system of ranking the honors degrees that students won, and convinced the fellows of a few colleges to choose future colleagues for their mental and moral gifts rather than for their attractiveness and clubbability. Above all, they tried to teach the Aristotelian and other ancient texts required for students of *literae humaniores* in a serious and systematic way, urging their pupils to grasp the philosophers' arguments per se and to see that they still bore on vital problems of morality and politics. "How can we say," Newman asked his students in his course on the *Ethics,*

> that a person by doing just actions *becomes* just, is he not just already—a person who performs grammatical or musical actions is a grammarian or musician—? . . . What three things are tests of a virtuous action? What thing *alone* is requisite for the possession of one of the arts? Is this same thing of *much* avail in the moral virtues?

This unhistorical but philosophically illuminating approach to the texts Pattison soon mastered. He became as stimulating a tutor as Oxford had, made Lincoln intellectually respectable, and soon had the pleasure of seeing that the brightest and most serious students in Oxford wished to be members of his previously obscure college. Through the 1840s he followed these well-trodden paths without dissatisfaction. He even defended the old tutorial system of instruction as a witness before the Royal Commission that investigated Oxford in 1850–52.

Personal disaster shook Pattison loose from tradition. In 1851 the old rector of Lincoln died. Pattison, backed by the younger, reformist fellows, hoped to succeed him and had a majority of votes pledged to him. But men changed sides at the last moment, and Thompson—a compromise candidate whom Pattison thought a "mere ruffian"—was elected in his place. "It was the return," Pattison later wrote, "to the reign of the satyrs and wild beasts—Thompson was nothing better than a satyr." He was "benumbed and stupefied—too stupefied to calculate the future." Though he managed to avoid losing his fellowship because of a technical breach of college rules, Pattison fell into despair and inactivity. He gave up his tutorship, left Oxford whenever he could, and spent his free time fishing in Scotland and walking across "large tracts of central and southern Germany, delighting in discovering nooks and corners unknown to guide-books."

During this period of misery Pattison's mature interests finally took shape. In 1851 the Clarendon Press published in two bulky volumes the diary of the sixteenth-century philologist Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614). It is a curious and compelling book, packed with anecdotes (Casaubon's comment on the first day he spent in the Bodleian Library was "Hodie vixi"—"Today I lived"). Pattison recalled that it "immediately riveted my attention. I saw what a mine of inquiry was opened into the progress of classical learning, from the Renaissance down to Niebuhr." He reviewed the diary at length in the *Quarterly.* And his forty-page essay established him as *the* English authority on the history of learning. He cultivated the field with unflagging energy—he bought and read hundreds of obsolete philological treatises, worked in Continental libraries and archives, and reviewed the most impressive of all nineteenth-century books in the area, Jacob Bernays's *Joseph Justus Scaliger* of 1855. Though he never wrote the vast life of Scaliger that he had planned as his great work, he did produce a solid book on Casaubon and a series of penetrating essays on the history of classical scholarship and education from the days of the sixteenth-century polymaths to the Germany of the generation just before his own.

Pattison wrote "about everything that can be known—and some other things too." He edited Pope and Milton with economical, informative commentaries. He did solid work on the history of English theology. But his studies of the classical tradition made his name. His review of Bernays brought him to the benevolent attention of that bitter, bril-

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liant German Jew, perhaps the most learned man in Germany, with whom he corresponded for decades. His hundred-page essay on Wolf fascinated such expert and critical readers as George Eliot and Matthew Arnold. His biography of Casaubon (1875) established new standards, at least in England, for completeness of documentation. And in the course of his reading and his trips to Germany, Pattison abandoned his trust in the old Oxford system that had betrayed his hopes. He became Oxford's greatest believer in advanced research. He supported expensive, erudite projects as a Delegate of the Clarendon Press. He fought to make working conditions more reasonable at the Bodleian. And he testified on behalf of endowed professorships and intellectual specialization before the second university reform commission in the 1870s. The discovery of what education and scholarship had been in Scaliger's Leiden and Wolf's Halle led Pattison to a new vision of what they should be in his Oxford. All of his historical work was written with the conditions of his own time firmly in mind; and that alone is enough to suggest that his objectivity was not complete.

To be sure, Pattison's writings on the history of learning have much to offer even now. Before most professional historians, he saw that history could no longer be an affair of drums and trumpets: "We can read anywhere of the battle-field and the council-chamber—show us, if you can, the domestic interior. We are sated with state apartments, let us have a peep into the kitchen or the housekeeper's room." Unlike the modern social historians who have followed these admonitions most closely, Pattison tried to recreate those slices of everyday life that he knew best in his own time: the day-to-day work of the teacher and scholar, the institutional, political, and economic organization of schools and universities. This he did with imagination and flair. Even the essays most flawed by factual errors retain a value for Pattison's vivid reconstructions of literary life in seventeenth-century Caen or nineteenth-century Berlin. And Pattison managed to avoid some serious errors that his successors have fallen into. Unlike some more recent historians of science and scholarship, he always evaluated the work of earlier scholars in the light of the methods and information at their disposal. After pointing out that Pierre Daniel Huet had allowed dogmatic considerations to dictate his choice of readings in the text of Origen, Pattison added:

> Not, be it observed, that he considers that what Origen wrote ought to be altered, but that Origen, being a Father (though not a saint) of the Church, must have written that which was orthodox. To expect him to have been emancipated from this idea, is to expect him to have been above his age.

Unlike a great many historians of education, he never confused the alteration of university statutes and curricula with the real reform of education:

> You must train your masters under your own eye. No regulations can make good schools; we must have men. Even training cannot do all. To the making a successful teacher there belongs a special *charisma*. No man should dedicate himself to the profession who does not feel a special vocation to it. A zeal for his occupation, a love for youth, a genuine, deeply-seated religious devotion to the service of the young, can alone make the toilsome occupation of school-teacher endurable.

And unlike many historians of ideas, he had a solid grasp of the content of the technical disciplines whose history he studied and an unusual ability to summarize technical points without losing clarity or brevity. No one could offer a more painless introduction to that most German of special studies, hermeneutics, than Pattison managed to slip into the beginning of his essay on the "Present State of Theology in Germany":

> We read a translation from the German as we would an original English book. We expect that, because the language difficulty is smoothed for us, we are to meet with no other impediment to apprehension than such as the subject itself may present. When we find that this is not the case, when we still encounter an element which eludes our grasp, and feel ourselves inhaling an atmosphere in which we do not freely breathe, we summarily condemn our book, form and matter, contents and treatment, together. No one does this with an old philosophy. No one expects from an English translation of the Vedas, or of Aristotle's Metaphysics, to find Hindoo or Greek philosophy lying patent before him. The whole of the interpretation is to come, after translation is ended. When we have penetrated the language, there remain many integuments through which we have to make our way to the thought. The intricacies of this process may be greater for an ancient, than for any modern, literature. But they

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exist in all. No one, certainly, is under any obligation to undertake this labour for the Theology of Germany. But no one has any right to pronounce it "unintelligible" till he has taken the proper means to understand it.

Moreover, Pattison devoted his life to a problem of great importance that had in his time received little systematic study. Long before the foundation of the Warburg Institute or the invention of *Rezeptionsgeschichte,* he had grasped that the history of the classical tradition formed a central and a variegated thread in the fabric of European cultural history. He summed up the great changes in the role of the classics in modern thought with breathtaking confidence and matchless brevity:

> Classical Antiquity has been found in various relations to the modern mind. 1. as furnishing the highest stimulant to thought & feeling—antagonistic to popular religion, & absolute power. 2. Dropt by the innovating minds it becomes the medium of general culture—ceasing to influence *philosophy* it influences *literature,* e.g. in France . . . Racine. 3. Passing out of culture it becomes Philology, a mere antiquarianism, the occupation of a professional Class, e.g. in Germany now. . . .
>
> The 16th cent. opened with the culte of pagan antiquity.
> 17th with that of Christian antiq.
> 18th with the contempt of all antiquity.

And though Pattison never wrote the "History of Learning" for which these sentences are a sketch, the larger views they reveal informed and gave breadth to the monographs he managed to complete.

Pattison's gifts as a stylist also make his work attractive. He wrote concise and powerful prose, enlivening every page with quotations, anecdotes, and his unique brand of hyperbole. Nothing could be more memorable—or less fair—than his bravura description of Jesuit learning:

> Jesuit learning is a sham learning got up with great ingenuity in imitation of the genuine, in the service of the church. It is related of the Chinese that when they first, in the war of 1841, saw the effect of our steam vessels, they set up a funnel and made a smoke with straw on the deck of one of their junks in imitation, while the paddles were turned by men below. Such a mimicry of the philology of Scaliger and Casaubon was the philology of the Jesuits. . . . It was that caricature of the good and great and true, which the good and great and true invariably calls into being: a phantom which sidles up against the reality, mouths its favourite words as a third-rate actor does a great part, undermimics its wisdom, overacts its folly, is by half the world taken for it, goes some way to suppress it in its own time, and lives for it in history.

And he could always touch that favorite Victorian organ stop, the pathetic. Nothing could have touched Victorian hearts more deeply than Pattison's often-quoted vignette of Scaliger's death: "On the 21st of January, 1609, at four in the morning, he fell asleep in Heinsius's arms. The aspiring spirit ascended before the Infinite. The most richly-stored intellect which ever spent itself in acquiring knowledge was in the presence of the Omniscient."

Yet one could ask for more than Pattison was willing to give. His analysis of Casaubon's scholarship—the life's work of the scholar he studied most closely—is insubstantial and unsatisfying. In the biography Pattison made little direct reference to Casaubon's published works, except where they offered curious stories about Casaubon's experiences. He made even less effort to analyze the rich stock of Casaubon's working papers in the Bodleian or the many annotated books in the British Museum. Casaubon's marginal notes —so said Pattison the bibliophile—were a mere "defacement" to the books they occurred in. And even Casaubon's huge commentaries on classical texts, for all their rich marbling of erudition, lacked the lean meat of argument and ideas. Pattison did not attack Casaubon's books for their dullness. Indeed, he tried to defend Casaubon and his fellow scholars from the attacks of De Quincey and other believers in "original thinking." But the terms of Pattison's defense are revealing. "The scholars," he wrote, "were not 'poor as thinkers,' because thinking was not their profession. They were busy interpreting the past. The fifteenth century had rediscovered antiquity, the sixteenth was slowly deciphering it. For this task memory, not invention, was the faculty in demand." Casaubon, in short, was a great man even though he had no ideas. His greatness lay in his patience and in the stock of learning he assembled, not in the finished products of his books: "The scholar is greater than his books. The result of his labours is not

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so many thousand pages in folio, but himself." And the deficiencies of this assessment are manifest. It implies that a man without ideas can be a successful interpreter of ancient texts. It accepts that outdated works of scholarship are of merely historical interest. And it does violence to the facts.

Pattison's *Casaubon*, in fact, in some ways has as little to do with the historical Casaubon as *Middlemarch* does. The real man was not the primitive accumulator of facts that Pattison described but an intellectual adventurer. In learning he matched the other polymaths of his generation, Lipsius and Scaliger. In historical insight and conjectural boldness he sometimes surpassed them. Two examples will give some inkling of his ability as a thinker.

Early in his twenties Casaubon published a commentary on Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers*. At one point in this anecdotal book, the poet and Homeric critic Aratus is represented as asking Timon of Phlius how he can get hold of a sound text of Homer. Timon tells him to find an old one—one that no one (that is, no one like Aratus) has tampered with. This uninspired anecdote inspired Casaubon. He reconsidered everything he knew about the origin, transmission, and state of preservation of the Homeric epics. His conclusions were as revolutionary as they were concise:

> If what Josephus says is true, that Homer did not leave his poems in written form, but they were preserved by memorization and written down much later, then I do not see how we can ever have them in a correct form, even if we have the oldest MSS. For it is likely that they were written down in a form quite different from that in which they were first composed.

Twenty years later Casaubon published a set of running notes on Dio Chrysostom. One of Dio's orations mentions Greeks who dwelt in Asia, "taking the land to inhabit from Priam and Hector." Here too a passing remark led Casaubon to rework traditional accounts of a complex problem:

> From this we learn that the Greeks settled in Asia even before the Ionian, Aeolian and Dorian colonies that the historians and geographers have made famous—and, indeed, as Dio thinks, from the time of the Trojan wars. . . . We show elsewhere that the Greeks were ignorant of their origins when they wrote that the Asiatic Ionians were descended from Europeans. On the contrary, they were the oldest of the Greeks.

Neither comment is necessarily "correct" in some ultimate, positivistic sense. Both, however, clearly reveal in Casaubon some of the very qualities that Pattison denied him: the acuity to cut to the heart of obscure problems, the audacity to jettison long-accepted views, and the capacity to call up, like a philological sorcerer's apprentice, legions of questions that would bedevil his professional successors for centuries. Casaubon's remark about Homer sums up in advance the great set of Homeric questions that German professors and English statesmen worried over throughout the nineteenth century. His suggestion about the Ionians shows that he had already glimpsed the task that ancient historians finally took upon themselves in Pattison's day: that of writing a history of Greece distinctively different from what the Greek historians had provided. These divinations did not emerge from the faculty of memory.

Pattison would not have had to mine Casaubon's huge folios in order to turn up these gems of analysis. Both were discussed in more modern works that he knew. The note on Homer and oral poetry is explicitly recorded in one of Pattison's notebooks. Moreover, after the book came out Bernays wrote to him about it. He praised the style and learning of the biography but regretted Pattison's inability—natural in one writing for the English public—to go into the *penetralia eruditionis*. And he urged Pattison to mention Casaubon's views on Homer and the Ionians in the second edition, if he could only bring himself "to discuss Casaubon's achievements as a scholar in some depth." But even to his admired German friend Pattison paid no attention. The second edition of *Casaubon* mentions neither remark, nor does it mention the many others like them that Pattison could have turned up if he had wished. Accordingly, it does no more justice than the first edition had to the qualities that make Casaubon memorable.

What we miss, in short, is "the usual German virtue . . . *Gründlichkeit*." And that is a puzzling omission in the work of so great an admirer and so committed an imitator of the

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Germans. I do not think that it is too hard on Pattison to assess his famous essays as noble failures. And I do not do so merely because his slips have given me occasion more than once for gnashing of teeth. He condemned himself out of his own pen. He claimed to assess the early scholars' work as well as to recapture the texture and flavor of their lives. He had the classical education and philological equipment to do so. He knew enough about editorial technique to make fun of Bywater when he compiled an inelegant critical apparatus. He knew enough about historical method to deplore Jebb's efforts to rewrite classical texts in defiance of the documentary evidence. And he knew enough about philological workmanship to appreciate a master's handiwork. What he admired above all in Bernays's work, so he wrote to his German friend, was "the ingenuity of your argumentation—the way in which, finding the allusion you want, in the most unexpected lurking place, you drag it out, and gradually prepare it for its place in the chain of proof." Yet for all Pattison's claims to be putting an end to the "carelessness of the literary writers of the last two centuries, which has been banished from philology & history," his published works reveal far more of the stylish prose he never boasted of than they do of the rigorous erudition he was famous for. True, his working notebooks bulge with painstaking transcripts of MSS from Continental libraries, detailed summaries of early works of erudition, and intelligent assemblies of quotations on such once-vexed issues as the nature of New Testament Greek. One cannot confront Pattison's notes without feeling new respect for their compiler. But the heady brew of learning of this kind Pattison reserved for private consumption. Hardly any of it seeped out into what he wrote for the public; and in consequence his writings look even feebler when compared with the materials he collected and did not use.

Pattison's failure as a scholar was the natural result of his upbringing and situation. He admired German professors; he was, after his hated rival, Thompson, finally died, the head of an Oxford college. And Pattison's Oxford offered little inducement to research. Professorships were few and counted for little in the university. Major academic offices were not given out on grounds of scholarly achievement, and major scholars—like Max Müller and James Murray—found little preferment. Most dons saw their posts as little more than lucrative stopgaps, to be rested in until a pleasant college benefice became vacant and they could happily decline into a daze induced by piety or alcohol. In Germany a single technical essay—like Bernays's famous one on the medical element in Aristotle's concept of catharsis—could make a career as well as a reputation. In Oxford it was more likely to make trouble—as Pattison found when his harmless historical contribution to *Essays and Reviews* landed him almost as deep in hot water as his fellow contributors, whose pieces were far more challenging to the established church.

Pattison recognized the flaws in the Oxford system and detested its results. "Max Müller's election to the chair of Sanskrit," he wrote to Bernays in 1860, "is still very doubtful. [It did not take place.] He is too accomplished & too liberal for the taste of such a body of electors as our Convocation." He sent his most talented pupils on to Bernays to see real philology being practiced in Germany; he encouraged them to found an Oxonian version of the German seminar, the Oxford Philological Society. And he continually complained that "We do nothing here."

But as a writer Pattison never rebelled against the system that had formed him. Like other dons, he wrote for money and applause rather than to win a chair or contribute to knowledge. Like other dons, he saw the ideal public for his work as the wide middle-class readership of the quarterlies. Like other dons, he saw everything he wrote—even *Casaubon*—as a cultivated essay meant to be read for pleasure (and he was bitterly disappointed when *Casaubon* received enthusiastic reviews but found few buyers). In some moods he could criticize his assumptions about the writer's role. In his first letter to Bernays he claimed to be "ashamed" of his attempt to review *Scaliger*:

> Your goodness, however, makes allowance for me, & you know our English circumstances. We must write that which will pay. 'Tis yours to draw the ore from the mine, we can but coin it into sixpences & distribute to the crowd.

But Pattison never explained why the master

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of an Oxford college and the heir to a substantial estate had to "write that which will pay." And when writing for English audiences he showed little critical detachment from English ideas about the role of the man of letters. He was even capable of abusing German prose in much the terms that obscurantist Oxford dons liked to use:

> All imagination, all colouring, all individuality is expelled from these dreary sentences, which average ten lines each, and of which we feel sure that no English or French readers would ever get through ten pages without nausea.

This from the defender of the great scholars whose profession was not thinking; this from the advocate of hermeneutics.

Pattison admired German learning from a great distance in space and Renaissance erudition from a great distance in time. He appreciated both and wrote vividly about them. But he lacked the courage to practice the Spartan intellectual virtues that he loved to praise, when there was no English public to applaud or pay him for doing so. Housman dismissed Pattison's failure with a characteristic turn of phrase: he had been "a spectator of all time and all existence, and the contemplation of that repulsive scene is fatal to accurate learning." It would be much fairer to say that Pattison was never able to tear up his roots. As much as he loved the new world of German scholarship, he came from an old world of quarterlies and gentle readers; and he could never quite imagine what it would be like to write without such a public in mind, even though he did more than anyone else to build an English public for exact scholarship. That helps to explain why his sketch for a "History of Learning" not only praised the German scholars who had first aimed "at a comprehensive view of the whole life of antiquity" but also viewed with dismay the fact that German learning had become of concern only to specialists: ". . . a mere antiquarianism, the occupation of a professional Class."

No wonder Pattison found writing and scholarship a mournful and unpleasant set of occupations. As a writer and scholar he was doomed to failure by the contradiction between his methods and his interests. How could he write elegant essays about a Scaliger or a Wolf and not come away imbued with a sense of his own moral and mental inferiority?

We should not estimate Pattison's value by his flawed books—any more than we should take them at their inflated current value. He deserves our interest as a complex, tormented figure, doomed to praise something of great value that he could not possess. He deserves our respect for his appreciation of the superiority of Scaliger and Bernays to him. And he deserves our attention as a witness to the vast cultural distances, far greater than geographical ones, that separated England from Germany, Oxford classics from German philology, and the knowingness of the English writer from the knowledge of the German scholar.

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Out of the Swim with Barbara Pym

ISA KAPP

In the canny, delectable novels of the British writer Barbara Pym, we can count on finding sanctuary from the enormous liberties and vast territory that have been gained by modern fiction. Miss Pym's unworldly cast—absentminded vicars beaming kindly over their spectacles, stilted anthropologists back from Africa with charts and kinship diagrams, accommodating clergymen's daughters snug in their modest legacies of Hepplewhite chairs and Victorian ornaments—preordains an absence of garish crime, sexual revelation, or hearts of darkness.

The setting, comfortably confining, is usually the parish church. "I sometimes thought how strange it was that I should have managed to make a life for myself in London so very much like the life I had lived in a country rectory when my parents were alive. But then so many parts of London have a peculiarly village or parochial atmosphere that perhaps it is only a question of choosing one's parish and fitting in to it," muses Mildred Lathbury, the narrator of Miss Pym's second and most benign novel, *Excellent Women*, preparing us for a tale of personal rather than cosmic crisis. In Mildred's style, serene and accepting, an elusive Pym seasoning—a compound of marinating self-deprecation and salty accuracy—is usually present to counteract her mild manners. Nevertheless, her genteel hesitations, her persistent decorum make it obvious that the novelist sees no excuse for turning the chaos within us into anarchy without. Unlike the star fiction writers of the last few decades, Barbara Pym is not much attracted to chaos, whether linguistic or emotional, and nurtures instead an implausible fascination for everything that is orderly and habitual. The lives of the Anglo-Catholic parishioners who are the main characters in several of her novels are punctuated by High Mass and Evensong and a generous calendar of holy days. In *Quartet in Autumn*, the remarkable, humorously somber novel about old age, published in 1977, three years before Miss Pym herself died, Edwin, wanting to make some provision of sociability for a retiring colleague, finds her a room in the vicinity of his church. "Now he could see the whole pattern emerging, with Letty's life governed by the soothing pattern of the church's year. All Saints' Day, then All Souls'. Then would come Advent. . . . After Christmas came Boxing Day, the Feast of St. Stephen. . . ."

All this regularity is surprisingly infectious, even to readers who know very little about church dogma or custom. To the extent that we are unqualified appreciators of Anglo-Catholic observances, we are much in the position of the appealing vicar's wife in *Jane and Prudence*. Jane, who in her youth wrote a book on seventeenth-century poets, has borrowed her romantic notions of a country parish from Trollope's novels. Comically wardrobed in baggy tweeds and layers of cardigans, gorgeously inept in the vicarage graces—she cannot pour tea or open a sherry bottle successfully—Jane nevertheless falls enthusiastically for the poetry and busyness of clerical life. "I love Evensong," she confides to her friend Prudence, who works in a London office and is supercilious toward village church functions. "There's something sad and

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essentially English about it, especially in the country, and so many of the old people are there. I always like that poem with the lines about gloved the hands that hold the hymnbook that this morning milked the cow."

An early novel, written in 1953, *Jane and Prudence* is full of natural hilarity, toned up with that singularly British resistance to dolors and depressions. Jane drops lines from Donne and Marvell inappropriately into prosaic discussions. She receives a call from the sententious Mr. Mortlake and, discovering that he has come to tune the piano rather than reprimand her for an unseemly outburst at the Parochial Church Council, she pirouettes about in relief, wearing his bowler hat and singing an operatic ditty. She makes extravagant conversation with a dull bank clerk: " 'I always think of the medieval banking houses in Florence; great times those must have been,' went on Jane rather wildly." Finally, there is an absurd scene of Jane lunching with her benevolent but distracted husband at "The Spinning Wheel," where the menu is a disconcerting choice between "toad in the hole" and curried beef. The proprietor relents sufficiently to bring them eggs and bacon, which they consume in grateful embarrassment, only to find that the bank clerk, one of the regulars, is being served a roast chicken with all the trimmings.

Jane is not a typical Pym heroine, having been saved by marriage from too much tidiness and self-absorption, and by poetry from parochialism. But she does embody, along with the others, the basic and altogether unfashionable (even in the 1950s) Pym philosophy that women are intended to serve and solace men. Her novels contain an endless repository of proprietary housekeepers, doting sisters, dutiful office employees, and affable parishioners who are on hand to brew tea, organize jumble sales, arrange flower displays, sort a deceased wife's clothing for a bereaved widower, and generally soften the edges of reality for helpless males.

"How convenient women were," thinks Rupert Stonebird, the prim anthropologist of *An Unsuitable Attachment*, "the way they were always 'just going' to make coffee or tea or perhaps had just roasted a joint in the oven or made a cheese souffle." Emma, the plain-faced anthropologist who has settled down to study the inhabitants of a village not far from London in *A Few Green Leaves*, meekly carries casseroles to a cottage in the woods rented by a fretful ex-lover. And it is only to be expected that Mildred in *Excellent Women* will worry about her new neighbor, a charming naval officer, when he comes home from duty in Italy to find his wife unsolicitous and his cupboard bare. Working part-time in an organization that helps impoverished gentlewomen, hurrying into St. Mary's Church ("prickly, Victorian-Gothic, hideous . . . but dear to me"), Mildred is the epitome of those esteemed and respected excellent women who "are not for marrying," but for charitable causes and parish occasions, the backbone of clerical life. That is to say, she fits theoretically into the category, but Miss Pym, never literal, brightens her lot with more piquant assignments. Mildred is recruited as a go-between in the marital misunderstandings of the colorful couple in the flat below; she consoles the ingenuous vicar when a scheming widow with small pointed teeth and apricot skin breaks off her engagement with him; she is ready with Camembert cheese and a dish of greengage plums when the naval officer's impatient wife deserts him; and eventually she is selected by Miss Pym's most prepossessing anthropologist, Everard Bone, severe and long-nosed but not altogether objectionable, to help him with his proofreading and his index.

Women like Mildred, diffident, taking almost nothing for granted, ministering to ungrateful men without resentment, are the nucleus of a veritable counter-revolution of falling expectations—and one almost unimaginable in America. In an age that goads its women into competition and aggressiveness, they are dignified anachronisms, somehow thriving on the tea, care, and advice they dispense with no hope of return. If this sounds much too virtuous and martyr-like to be fun, the truth is that the women in Barbara Pym's novels are, on the contrary, very resourceful at eking out their pleasures. They know, unlike most liberated women, how to wrest a lot out of a little, are masters (or mistresses) at making do.

But the real upshot of the matter is that Barbara Pym sees woman's place from a very strange perspective: to her, this is really a woman's world, and men are the weaker sex. Jane, speculating on why her attractive friend

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Prudence has fallen in love with a colorless young man, thinks, "But of course . . . that was why women were so wonderful; it was their love and imagination that transformed these unremarkable beings. . . . Perhaps love affairs with handsome men tended to be less stable because so much less sympathy and imagination were needed on the women's part?" The quizzical message of many Pym novels is that women, like cats (both suavely portrayed in *An Unsuitable Attachment*), are self-contained and can manage competently and even satisfactorily by themselves. Inevitably an episode turns up in which a woman (Ianthe in *An Unsuitable Attachment,* Leonora in *The Sweet Dove Died*) returns to her solitary flat and likes it, or savors the room in which she is an unescorted visitor. "I was glad to be alone in my room," reports Wilmet in *A Glass of Blessings,* "with the view over the garden, the well-polished mahogany furniture, pink sheets and towels, and a tablet of rose-geranium soap in the washbasin. Rowena always remembered that it was my favorite. The room seemed so very comfortable, somehow even more than my room at home—perhaps because I could be alone in it."

Of course, some of these claims about the natural superiority of women are presented tongue in cheek—but not all of them, because Barbara Pym is, without being in any sense a conventional feminist, a great morale booster for women. She vouchsafes them their condescensions as well as their subserviences and permits them to be desirable though dowdy—indeed it sometimes looks as if dowdiness were more the mark of spirituality or an agreeable nature than an unlucky choice in dress. Ugly ducklings prosper and the conceited get their comeuppance, but in either case, Barbara Pym's women survive and remain admirably in character.

Whatever lack of importance Miss Pym attributes intellectually to women's clothing, it is certainly a subject that is much on her mind. She is an indisputable authority on its hierarchy of taste and temperament and makes the finest distinctions in defining the wardrobes of her female characters. When she assures you that a certain kind of woman is always to be found at social functions in a simple blue or green wool dress, you can believe it. Penelope, the "pre-Raphaelite beatnik" of *An Unsuitable Attachment,* makes her appearance in tartans or a black sack-like dress and a medallion on a silver chain; the elegant Wilmet in *A Glass of Blessings* announces complacently, "It's a sort of mole-colored velvet dress . . . and I shall wear my Victorian garnet necklace and earrings with it"; the incorrigible Jane goes everywhere in her ancient tweed coat; and the self-preening Leonora of *The Sweet Dove Died* fancies herself in cool amethyst or remote black lace. By their clothes shall ye know them!

It is high time to mention that, although the precision of Miss Pym's observation of speech, manner, and mentality is awesome, the radius of her novels is startlingly narrow. There is more *not* happening in them than happening. The best-willed matchmaking goes awry, and a good many of the characters of both genders manage to avoid getting married or even falling authentically in love. "Love was rather a terrible thing," decides Mildred Lathbury. "Not perhaps my cup of tea." And it is much the same with Leonora in *The Sweet Dove Died* and even comely Prudence, who hankers for the experience but never succumbs. In *An Unsuitable Attachment* Ianthe, fastidious and self-possessed and already in her thirties, befriends a slightly younger man and reaches, in the most shy and tentative way, the condition of the title. On a parish trip to Rome she finds herself acutely in need of comfort and "benison" because "she had admitted to herself that she loved him, had let her love sweep over her like a kind of illness, 'giving in' to the flu, conscious only of the present moment." For Barbara Pym, love is a vagrant impulse, evanescent and untrustworthy, quite unlike the desire for security and routine, for tea, and for a pleasant room. Ianthe is luckier than most of Miss Pym's women, for whom any kind of passion is simply unheard of.

Logically enough, children rarely poke their disrupting heads into the proceedings. In *A Glass of Blessings* Wilmet's friends Harry and Rowena (a rare parent couple, possibly the only one in Miss Pym's novels) assure her that breakfast will be brought to her in bed. "Ours is a terrible meal on Saturdays because we have the children with us. I shan't inflict that on you." Other oppressions that Miss Pym does not inflict upon her readers include argumentation, violence, intellectuality, politics, or even overly long, intense

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conversations. And despite the cozy familiarity with every aspect of the lives of the clergy, even a powerful emotional entanglement with either the theology or the spirituality of religion is noticeably absent.

To a considerable extent this deliberate avoidance of "action" is the result of Barbara Pym's unbudgeable honesty. Apart from her wartime service in the women's branch of the Royal Navy in Britain and Naples, she herself led a sedentary life, writing her novels and working from 1958 to 1974 as editorial secretary of the International African Institute and simultaneously as an editor of its anthropological journal, *Africa*. She never married and preferred—temperamentally, I surmise—to write about people and feelings that she knew. "Let other people get married," a friend of Mildred's tells her. "Let Dora get married if she likes. She hasn't your talent for observation."

Although Miss Pym does write mainly about male and female spinsters, about men and women who are timid, reserved, and unenterprising, who huddle into the church for safety and companionship, it would be a great mistake to confuse her restrictedness with triviality. She means us to sense that many of the predicaments and habits she describes are to be found everywhere: women without occupation, happenstance marriage, foolishly envisioned romance, and—always a major Pym theme—the need to adapt to one's limitations. These subjects are as alive among Scandinavian teak and glassy condominiums as they were among Victorian bric-a-brac.

Calm as the narrator's voice may be, a Pym novel is never lacking in suspense. Much more than a comedy of manners, it is a drama of disposition, willpower, and ethics, a closer relation of E. M. Forster and Henry James than of those busier and giddier novelists with whom this writer is usually linked: Angela Thirkell, Anthony Powell, and Iris Murdoch. Miss Pym does not sermonize us in quite the self-satisfied way that Jane Austen did. She does have a rather exacting glossary of vices and virtues, but it must be admitted that the vices are mild ones like vanity, irritability, indifference, and condescension, and her reproaches are equally mild. Partly this is just plain subtlety, a fictional trait going rapidly into disrepute. In *A Glass of Blessings*, we are nearly at the end of the book before the full realization comes over us that Wilmet is more than a little vain as well as unbelievably blind. This heroine-narrator pampers herself with an infatuation for a moody fellow who likes her well enough but is more patently enamored of the effeminate youth he lives with. She persuades herself that her husband is stodgy and dull, when he is in fact balanced, humorous, and affectionate. Barbara Pym arranges for us to see Wilmet's egocentricity and not like her less, but more, because we are privy to her weakness; and she arranges for her heroine to acknowledge it without becoming dismal. The book ends with husband and wife on the best of terms, moving into a new flat because Rodney's sprightly mother, pushing seventy, has married an archaeologist friend and put them out of the house. Events may have been dampening, but their good humor persists. They are conscious, as is the author, that

> When God at first made man,
> Having a glasse of blessings standing by;
> Let us (said he) poure on him all we can:
> Let the world's riches, which dispersed lie,
> Contract into a span.
>
> (George Herbert, "The Pulley")

One of the great joys of reading Barbara Pym is that she laces her prosaic situations irrepressibly with stanzas of wonderful poetry. Like the novels, the poems confirm her conviction that the lives we live can be frugal, circumscribed, sometimes ego dampening—but not without their pleasures—and that there is more to be salvaged in any predicament than we suspect. One of the very few writers who makes virtue seem genuinely appealing, she is able to persuade us that neatness, thrift, secondhand clothes, and meager meals are no obstacle to happiness, and that doing what we ought is itself a pleasure of high quality. As there is not very much doing at any particular moment, she and her characters have the leisure to pause and ask themselves whether they are, in fact, doing the right thing.

The incredibly angelic Mary Beamish of *A Glass of Blessings* is forever wondering if she has taken on enough good works; at the opposite extreme, the four elderly office colleagues from *Quartet in Autumn* grudgingly speculate whether some small fraternal gesture might

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not be in order. Of the four, Marcia and Norman are inveterate curmudgeons; the others, Letty and Edwin, have impulses to be congenial but are too passive and uncertain to put them into practice. When the women retire, the men carefully weigh the pros and cons of inviting them to lunch; and when Letty is forced out of her rooming house (taken over by a hymn-singing Nigerian landlord), the misanthropic Marcia feels a resentful obligation (which she squelches) to offer her lodging. Every so often, one or another member of the quartet takes a bus in the direction of one of the women, but never quite reaches his destination. If they do manage some token of sociability, they are inexplicably pleased with themselves.

Quartet in Autumn is the small masterpiece that came out in 1977 after sixteen years of the writer's silence. The five novels she published in the 1950s were well received, but a later one, *An Unsuitable Attachment*, was turned down in 1963, possibly because it seemed too slight and sheerly aesthetic in a decade girding itself for political anger. Miss Pym was disappointed enough to stop writing until David Cecil and Philip Larkin named her, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, the most underrated writer of the century. Published in her sixty-fourth year, *Quartet in Autumn* is about aging, isolation, and recalcitrance, all within the author's own experience; and we have to marvel at the skill with which she rescues them from grimness. It's true that she sometimes frightens us to the core by stepping resolutely onto ground—human intractability, the dominion of age—where even clerics fear to tread. But our apprehensions are countered by the expected Pym levity in the midst of gloom: Marcia waxing furious because one of the empty milk bottles she has collected does not match the others; Marcia appearing at a lunch reunion in a light summer coat, fur-lined sheepskin boots, and jaunty straw hat; the bouncy obtuse social worker trying to lure an adamant Marcia into activities for the "lonely ones"; and Pym's eerily exact rendition of the pat phrases her characters rely on—Norman's chirpy "That's the ticket," amiable Letty's "Oh, how lovely," and Marcia's "I was never a big eater." But what really thaws the autumnal chill is the writer's insistence on the grain of salvageability in the obdurate quartet, the calm assessment, conveyed by all her novels and voiced by Letty, that "It's up to oneself, to adapt to circumstances."

Miss Pym's next book, *The Sweet Dove Died*, concocts a more glamorous plot based, a shade more ruthlessly, on the identical philosophy. It is about a handsome, aging woman, Leonora, who loves only perfect objects and a perfect ambiance. She takes up with a susceptible young man who suits her requirements, and she assumes she will be granted the rights of possession; but he jilts her for an aggressive homosexual. There are two surprises for the reader here. The first, which should not in fact be surprising, is the dignity with which Leonora, accustomed only to gallantry from men, accepts her defeat. (We can't help thinking of the pathos Tennessee Williams laid on with a trowel in a similar situation in *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone.*) The second is that in this late work, and in connection with so cool a heroine, Barbara Pym makes the first attempt in her fiction to bring her characters to the point of physical sex.

Though lightened by a mocking wit, *The Sweet Dove Died* hasn't the relaxed and artful waggery that slithers through the other novels. In those books where she deals with the mundane areas of life—seedy cafés, civil-service offices, parish functions—Miss Pym is irresistibly droll.

> "Five-past eleven," said Miss Trapnell. "I hope they've put the kettle on."
>
> "I thought I heard a sound," said Miss Clothier, opening her tin of biscuits.
>
> "What kind of a sound?" asked Prudence idly.
>
> "The sound of running water."
>
> "Did you say rushing water?" asked Miss Trapnell seriously.
>
> "No, no; *running* water," said Miss Clothier impatiently. "As if somebody was filling a kettle."

Miss Pym notices the wary eye that those who lunch in cafeterias cast upon their table mates, the disdain with which they watch someone "tucking into" a steamed pudding they have just rejected as fattening. She is not shocked when a vicar's wife confides that she has greater rapport with her cat than with her husband. She is ironic about marriage and friendship, and amused by the sinful curiosity of High Church Anglicans about "Romish" practices. And if you read enough of her books, you will run into a Peter De Vriesian

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streak of nomenclatural whimsy. Thus the heroine whose matchmaking is as inept as that of Austen's Emma, is named Jane; or, having told us in *Excellent Women* that her heroine is plain, but not at all like Jane Eyre, Pym proceeds to endow her most elegant heroine, Leonora, with the last name of Eyre.

There is no doubt that Barbara Pym is an extraordinarily forebearing and compassionate writer, but it is the layer beneath those warm qualities, a layer of sheer spinal firmness and imperturbable detachment that puts her into the rank of first-rate novelists. That detachment is what we meet in every successful comic with a straight face, and along with it goes a many-layered intelligence: the ability to see several things at the same time, not only the poignancy, the pity of it all (*that* most of us can see), but the risible oddness of our behavior and the miraculous resilience of our nature.

Homage to Webern

PAUL BRESLIN

Your music lasts three hours—a lifework pent
inside one Mozart opera. Each note leans
into the next with a panicked urgency
that would have seemed, to Mozart's audience,
surrender to the unredeemed condition
music heals by giving every moment,
through relation to the rest, a sweetness
it had lacked alone. But here, relation
means anticipating when the brutal
interval, the interrupting silence
comes, as someone in the woods at night
might trip and, knowing he had lost the path,
guess from his accident where it must be.
Yours was the modern genius, that knows the heart
not as a rhythm deep inside the body
urging us outward to our loves and wars,
but as mind's object, "Here Be Monsters" scrawled
across the very center of the map.
Your music ends as we're afraid we'll end:
the pattern secretly completes itself
before we understand it, leaving us
to ask whose will we did, if not our own.

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Verbal Euthanasia

ERNEST GELLNER

PHILOSOPHY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. *By A. J. Ayer. Random House. $22.50.*

What is the underlying plot of English-speaking philosophy in the twentieth century? A. J. Ayer, in his new survey of the subject, offers a neat answer with which, as it happens, I warmly agree: "For my own part, I think that if one were looking for a single phrase to capture the stage to which philosophy has progressed, 'the study of evidence' would be a better choice than 'the study of language.' "

I feel even more enthusiastic about the reason he gives for this substitution: "The study of evidence goes further, inasmuch as it does not limit us, as 'the study of language' appears to do, to elucidating the contents of our beliefs, but also raises the question of our warrant for holding them." Yes, indeed: it is the validation rather than the mere contents of our beliefs that concerns us. The central thread in modern philosophy is the theory of knowledge. Its basic question is really a moral or normative one: what kinds of cognitive claim are justified? What thought-styles deserve our respect and adherence?

All this seems to me admirable. But a mere few pages earlier, Ayer reiterates, firmly and without equivocation, the view that moral evaluation is excluded from philosophy. This is a doctrine with which he has long been associated—and in a more provocative formulation, affirming that ethical statements are meaningless—and it contributed to the succès de scandale of his first, and still his most famous, book.

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> The mistake is that of supposing that morality is a subject like geology, or art-history. . . . There is no such thing as an authoritative guide to moral judgment, of which [the philosopher] could acquire the mastery. As far as the conduct of life is concerned, he has no professional advantage over anyone else.

Very well. The case for this view is well known and powerful. But is not the choice of thought-style also part of "the conduct of life"? Are not the options and choices that arise in this field as important and fundamental as our choices of, say, political or economic or sexual morality? Is it not probable, in fact, that our choices in these latter fields hinge on our assessment of what types of evidence we find adequate? How can Ayer, within the space of a very few pages, argue both (correctly) that the evaluation of thought-styles is the central part of philosophy and also (correctly or otherwise) that the evaluation of life practices is no part of philosophy?

Let it be said right away that his latest book contains no answer to this question. He doesn't even mention it, and one can only suppose that he has failed to notice it. The contradiction between spurning normative reasoning in general, as he seems to do, and commending its practice in the study of evidence, as he also does, can of course be avoided on certain assumptions. These assumptions were once quite fashionable, and I think that Ayer at some time or another probably shared, or at least tacitly endorsed, them. These assumptions were that the relationship of evidence to conclusions was fundamentally logical and, hence, that issues about the adequacy of evidence for given conclusions could be settled without the use of extra-logical premises. If so, then the validation of beliefs,

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given some evidence, would raise no problems other than, at most, those of the validity of deductive logic. But if Ayer ever did believe this, I am confident that he would not defend such a position now. It has become evident that the link between evidence and most of our beliefs (perhaps all of them) is seldom if ever a matter of manifest, self-validating, deductive reasoning.

So we, or Ayer, are left with quite a problem. Why is normative reasoning a good thing in the theory of evidence (or the theory of knowledge, to give it its old name)? Why is the semi-covert introduction of questions of value to be welcomed in that sphere, as it is by Ayer? And why is, at the very same time, evaluative reasoning to be excluded from philosophy? Why reject the genus, and then, without explanation, welcome an important species of it?

Before exploring this further, let us look at the context in which Ayer (rightly, though not consistently) welcomes the presence of evaluation in the study of evidence. He recommends preoccupation with "evidence," as opposed to the recently fashionable preoccupation with "language." He thinks *evidence* is a better key word than *language*, precisely because it leads us to issues of validation, which *language* in his view fails to do.

Why, then, had language been brought into the matter at all? Oh, says Ayer in an offhand manner, it is a matter of technical convenience: "To discover what support propositions of one type bestow on those of another we need to know what is meant by the sentences by which the propositions are respectively expressed." Well, that would seem obvious enough. In fact, nothing could be more false than the suggestion that language acquired its central place in recent philosophy for a reason as trite as this.

The reason why it happened goes much deeper. It was intimately connected with that problem of validity or normativeness about which Ayer is so inconsistent, if not ambivalent. Language was brought into twentieth-century philosophy as a much-acclaimed deus ex machina—and on at least two distinct occasions—in order to solve this very problem.

On the first occasion, the idea was that, in the end, language and the world somehow had the same or parallel structures. This was supposed to explain why and how language managed to describe the world. The view was brilliantly expounded by Bertrand Russell in his book on Leibniz. Russell attributed this assumption to Leibniz and argued, very persuasively, that this alone makes sense of Leibniz's otherwise rather bizarre philosophy. Russell himself held a version of this view during his "Logical Atomist" period. But the most famous, poetically dramatic, but utterly obscure and aphoristic exposition of this view is to be found in Wittgenstein's youthful *Tractatus*, which had accompanied Wittgenstein when he was on the Tyrolean front and when he was a prisoner of war in Italy at the end of the First World War, and which was published bilingually in England after the war, with an introduction by Russell. The *Tractatus* taught that underneath the superficial and contingent complexities of colloquial speech, a true logical form lurked hidden, which, as it happens, had an astonishing similarity to the logical notation recently used and developed by Russell and Whitehead. More important still, perhaps, that logical form was isomorphous with the microstructure of the world, and for this reason it could mirror the world and enable us to speak about it.

The doctrine as such does not concern us here. What is relevant is the use to which it was put. The doctrine contained, implicitly and explicitly, a set of commandments or imperatives concerning how and indeed what we may think. Its implicit and explicit commandments were, notoriously, inconsistent: Wittgenstein's book itself violated its own rules and, consequently, had to contain the order to the reader to cease talking and thinking like the book, as soon as he had understood its real message. But what was the authority of Wittgenstein's Sermon on the Alps? Who was he to tell us how to think and speak? The logical validation of his authority was quite simple. If there simply is no other way to speak and think meaningfully, well, then, of course you must speak and think in that way. If there is but one option, well, then, that option becomes mandatory. It is said that *ought* implies *can;* rather more cogently, *can no other* implies *must.*

The actual contents of Wittgenstein's first gospel were bizarre and schizoid, combining the utmost puritanical restrictions on what we may say (stricter than those of any positivism, to which his views were rightly linked), with a

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The 1982 Phi Beta Kappa Book Awards

The Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science

EMERGING COSMOLOGY. *Bernard Lovell. Columbia University Press. $14.95.*

Citation: Bernard Lovell's *Emerging Cosmology* treats the history of cosmology from the earliest speculations about the universe to our modern conceptions. "The fascinating interplay across the frontiers of knowledge," writes Lovell in the introduction, "has been continuous and unending. The stabilization of the transcendental and scientific approaches to the cosmological problem has been a vital issue in the emergence of civilization. At no epoch in the last two millenia has either approach been dominant, and neither can claim ultimate authority today. For two millenia the advance of cosmology has illuminated the injunction of Francis Bacon: 'And generally let this be a rule, that all partitions of knowledges be accepted rather for lines and veins, than for sections and separations; and that the continuance and entireness of knowledge be preserved.' " *Emerging Cosmology* is to be praised for both its reach and its brevity. It is distinguished for its erudition, and at the same time, it is comprehensible to the intelligent layman. It is an excellent example of an accurate historical investigation enhanced by the perceptive commentary of one of the world's most eminent astronomers.

The Christian Gauss Award

THE LIFE OF THE POET: BEGINNING AND ENDING POETIC CAREERS. *Lawrence Lipking. University of Chicago Press. $20.*

Citation: Lawrence Lipking states in the preface to *The Life of the Poet:* "Poems (at least since the time of Hesiod) have always confided something about the life of the poet: not necessarily his personality or even his individuality, but his sense of a vocation and a destiny. . . . This is a book about the life of the poet: poetic vocations, poetic careers, poetic destinies." Professor Lipking brilliantly explores these concerns, focusing on three moments: the poet's initiation or breakthrough; the summing-up; and the passage—when the legacy of the poet's work is transmitted to the next generation. No poet, he argues, can avoid these testing moments that question whether his work exists, whether it exists as more than the sum of its parts, and whether it will continue to exist. To test his own argument, Professor Lipking explores an astonishing range of poems. Yet this breadth of interest never makes him glide on surfaces. His scholarship gives depth and precision to the readings, which are generously placed in the context of those by other critics, and then deftly distinguished from them. This is a valuable book in its scholarly breadth and authority, its elegance, and its generosity.

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Award

PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLANATIONS. *Robert Nozick. Harvard University Press. $25.*

Citation: Robert Nozick's *Philosophical Explanations* is one of the most important books in contemporary philosophy. While parts of it may be difficult for the literate laity, this book is a genuine contribution to the philosophical understanding of life in the broadest possible sense of philosophy, freeing it from its dependence on science and mathematical logic exclusively and returning it to the consideration of problems that concern the ordinary, thoughtful citizen. A work of dazzling brilliance, rich and often difficult, *Philosophical Explanations* cannot be easily summarized. Nozick takes ancient philosophical issues and breathes new life into them in a work that demands careful and prolonged study. It offers great rewards to the enlightened and dedicated reader and will undoubtedly be the subject of discussion and articles for many years to come.

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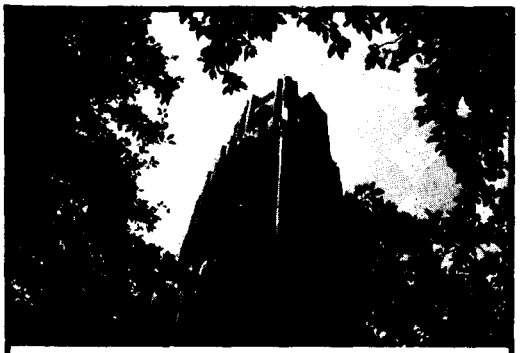

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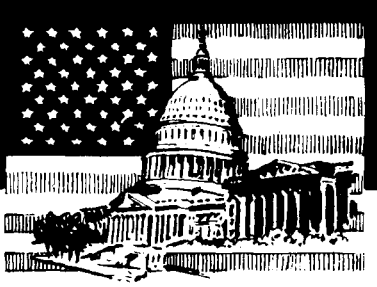

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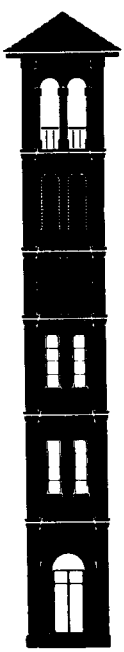

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totally abandoned, indulgent, antinomian permissiveness with respect to what we may mean but may not say. The kind of ferocious oscillation between indulgence and denunciation that Tolstoy displayed toward sex, Wittgenstein displayed toward meaning. His characteristic blend of positivism and mysticism could be—and was—adjusted by each follower, mixing the two elements according to taste and mood, and this, in part, is the explanation of Wittgenstein's popularity. But what concerns us here is this: Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* used the idea of language-reality parallelism to bridge that gap between *is* and *ought* and told us how to speak and think. If but one kind of language is possible, then it is mandatory. The thought-style it embodies is thereby validated.

The second time language was used for purposes of validation, it was done rather differently, but still under the aegis of the selfsame Wittgenstein. This was the famous intellectual revolution that dominated English-speaking philosophy during the post–Second World War period, though far less so in the United States than in Britain. Ayer had initially remained cool and detached from it, especially during the period of its greatest confidence; later he wavered somewhat. The basic idea of that revolution was the passionate repudiation of the earlier language-world parallelism doctrine, which had made language hover in a ghostlike manner over and outside reality, like the Word over the waters, and the replacement of this version by a thoroughly earthy, human, naturalistic, diversity-recognizing, daily-life-bound view of language. The Word was made flesh with a vengeance and relished all the weaknesses of the flesh. The new wisdom taught that language was used in a wide variety of contexts for a wide variety of ends and that no single formula or scheme can do justice to them all. Nothing is uniquely dictated by a suprahuman logic. Language is what *we* do, and language is what we *do*.

This once-so-influential "later philosophy of Wittgenstein" can be summed up in two theses: (1) the naturalistic, diversified, social-activity-incarnated view of language; and (2) the claim that what are normally considered to be philosophical problems are only engendered by a misunderstanding of language. Generically speaking, this misunderstanding consists of an unwitting denial of the first theory manifesting itself in the pursuit of some simple and general model for the relationship between words and things. *Past* philosophy consisted of the unwarranted imposition of some such scheme onto the rich concrete diversity of ordinary language. Philosophical theories, and indeed philosophical problems, are but the shadows of this misguided activity, which can never be crowned with success, for it springs from a fundamental misunderstanding of the real nature of language. So, though philosophy cannot succeed, it can be cured. The only way of curing it is to attend carefully to the real, concrete, socially incarnate employment of the terms connected with this or that putative philosophical problem. But then there are no problems, really, for that would imply the possibility of solutions. There are only puzzles, which can be shown—given skill and patience and the key Wittgensteinian insight—to be groundless and hence to call for no answer.

So the famous "bewitchment by language" was really a bewitchment by a mistaken and unconsciously held *theory* of language. Attend to language as it really is, and you'll be un-witched. There will then be no philosophical problems, and as the obverse of this, your previous unsophisticated, commonsensical convictions will stand vindicated, not by a proof (for that cannot be), but by the realization that they have no case to answer.

I have no quarrel with the first thesis. I refrain from endorsing it here mainly because it would be a bit absurd to pretend to decide the enormous issue between the naturalistic and the Platonic vision, in an en passant manner, without sustained argument.

The second thesis, on the other hand, is blatantly and demonstrably false. Most or all philosophic issues, and the deep and unavoidable normative options hinging on them, arise quite independently of our theories of language. The adoption of a naturalistic and polymorphous theory of language does nothing whatever to obviate them, or even to modify their formulation or make them more tractable. My quarrel with Wittgenstein and his school stems mainly from the fact that this absurd position was, especially during the

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period of sublime confidence that eventually subsided during the 1960s (and I like to think that my own book, *Words and Things*, made some contribution to that), rendered comically impregnable by being built into a system of definitions and procedures, within which there was simply no way of even articulating the denial of that position. Wittgenstein himself, for instance, in effect defined philosophy as whatever satisfied the second thesis, which indeed puts that thesis in a pretty strong position. The reverent procedural practice that accompanied all this required that the detailed examination of usages relevant to the "puzzle" in question be carried on indefinitely until such time as the puzzle obliged by disappearing. The formulation of a theory about the puzzling material was proscribed; for, after all, was it not the pursuit of a general theory (where there was none to be had) that had generated the puzzle in the first place? This prohibition made it impossible even to articulate a denial of the second theory.

As no deadline was ever given for the predicted "dissolution" of the "puzzle," the fulfillment of the prediction that such a dissolution would come could never be put to the test. *That* it would come was entailed by the second meta-theory and that was quite enough. The discussion of the merits of the second theory was prevented by the interdict on theory, which in turn was itself part and parcel of the very procedures required by the unquestioned and indeed unquestionable, because in the main only insinuated, meta-theory (though Wittgenstein himself, and occasionally lesser mortals, too, were granted dispensation to spell it out—a dispensation withheld, however, from anyone wishing to articulate it for the purpose of examining it critically). The circle was complete and there was no breaking out of it. To describe the functioning of the circle, which, of course, was the only possible way of challenging it, was castigated as impolite and hence precluded any need for an answer. Seldom has there been a system quite so watertight. And, one might add, never in the history of human thought has so much been claimed for so little.

Ayer quotes Wittgenstein's own summary of the method: "We may not advance any kind of theory. . . . We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place." The description envisaged here is that of the use of words.

Practitioners tried to refrain from articulating the meta-theory of the method, for to do so would be to violate its anti-theoretical, self-denying ordinance. They did not succeed, of course, and the theory was half-stated and insinuated in all kinds of ways. All philosophical theories are unsayable, but some are less unsayable than others.

All this is an old story. But it is highly relevant here. Once again, the idea of language was used to engender normative conclusions, but in a very complex, ingenious, not to say tortuous, way. If all traditional philosophic questions arise from a misunderstanding of how language really works and can be obviated by careful attention to the real functioning of speech, then ordinary language and the assumptions built in to it are automatically revalidated. The question of whether or not our general beliefs are sound, and warranted by the evidence at our disposal, does not arise. Common sense has no case to answer. It inherits the earth, as a kind of residual legatee, all philosophies having first been eliminated by a process of somewhat tedious verbal euthanasia.

The ordinary lived world, with all the moral and other baggage with which it is so plentifully endowed, is thereby granted a warranty of reliability. This message had been most eagerly awaited. The ordinary lived world had been eroded for some centuries by both science and philosophy. Science had shown that the real structures that govern events are markedly at variance with those built in to commonsense assumptions. Philosophy had shown that the evidence at our disposal fails to justify many of our cherished convictions. Here, by contrast, there was Instant and Omnibus Revalidation, a carte blanche for any and every culture. It was an example of one of the most prosperous intellectual industries of our age, Lebenswelt Restorations, Inc. Common Sense was the local name for Lebenswelt, and ordinary language was the shrine in which its Geist had made its home. How one uses this idea when a number of rival cultures are in conflict or in rapid flux was a question that was not seriously considered.

A curious thing has happened since Witt-

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genstein and his school ceased to be so very influential. His weird, totally false, but interesting second thesis is somewhat furtively forgotten: it is certainly not affirmed, but its denial, which would be an instructive new starting point, is not conspicuous either. It seems to be preferable just to try and forget it and the fact that it was so enthusiastically embraced. But the first theory, the naturalistic view of language, which for Wittgenstein was merely of instrumental importance as a would-be means of establishing the absurd position of the second theory, is systematically sinned against in practice. Yet it had much merit. Nonetheless, the strained forcing of language onto a logical or set-theoretical notation, useful no doubt for the problems of the foundations of mathematics but of questionable relevance elsewhere, is now very much in evidence. Philosophy by typographical jargon, as Collingwood called it, abounds. By now it seems no longer necessary to attack Wittgenstein's absurd conclusion (though it may be necessary to remind people of the verve and faith with which it was once embraced); but, ironically, it does seem necessary to defend Wittgenstein's rather sensible starting point—the repudiation of the view that men speak in logical notation without knowing it.

The relevance here of all this is that from Ayer's account, the reader would be hard put to work out either the underlying normative problem or the social context that helps define it. The surface tactics are well described, but the underlying philosophical motivation and strategy are not easy to discern. Yet here is a movement that tried to do what Ayer says needs doing—namely, to find out what warrant we have for our beliefs. The movement did it ill, but it is necessary to highlight precisely what it was that was being done.

Ayer comes very close to denying the existence of such a movement when he writes: "There is a widespread belief that in the years following the Second World War the English philosophical scene was dominated by something called Linguistic Philosophy." This widespread belief is entirely correct. Ayer doesn't actually say that it isn't, though the tone of the sentence suggests as much. The next sentence complains that "unprofessional commentators" lumped together diverse individuals and groups—Wittgenstein, J. L. Austin, G. Ryle, Ayer himself, and their respective pupils—under this name. Ayer suggests that in the interests of clarity, the expression should be restricted to Austin's group only.

It is perfectly true that Ayer's own principal position (disregarding some vacillations fairly late in his career) ought not to be lumped together with linguistic philosophy. But by classing this genuine error (never to my knowledge committed by any professional) with the other perfectly valid classifications, Ayer rather unfairly hints that they, too, are incorrect. Yet if we mean by linguistic philosophy (as we should) the sustained effort at revalidating common sense and discrediting philosophical theories by the detailed investigation of ordinary language, then all the people listed (bar Ayer) do deserve to be put under that very roof. The differences between them were not significant. Wittgenstein mainly preached the method, while Ryle and Austin tried to practice it. Wittgenstein and Austin had this in common: they both tended to issue undated promissory notes, to the effect that the method must (Wittgenstein) or may (Austin) work, without actually delivering any solutions; whereas Ryle, more courageous, forthright, or foolhardy, actually offered a solution to the mind-body problem, which patently did not work. This difference should, however, be counted entirely in Ryle's favor.

Ayer's attempt to deny that a movement with a highly coherent and distinctive underlying idea ever existed goes as far as putting Austin into a quite separate section of the book from the later Wittgenstein and Ryle and placing Carnap (whose style was always closer to Ayer's own) in with the latter two. All this really is very unfair to the reader. The fact that a highly distinctive school had existed with its own very idiosyncratic way of handling the problem that Ayer has now highlighted—how do we validate our convictions?—would escape the reader altogether if he were obliged to rely on this book alone.

Ayer's own classical position, as outlined in *Language, Truth and Logic*, was also (though he would not have recognized it at the time) basically a normative exercise. It differed from that of the linguistic philosophers not merely in its conclusions (it awarded certificates of authenticity to a much smaller class of

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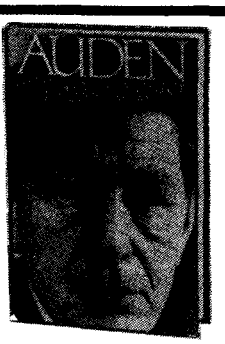

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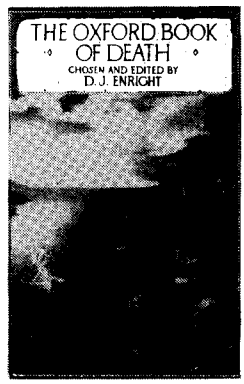

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beliefs), but above all in its method. Though "language" figures prominently in its title and rhetoric, it was really quite inessential (as he would now, I think, recognize). The position can be formulated psychologistically, as Hume did, or in terms of language, as the young Ayer did, and no advantage attaches to the latter formulation.

That it was basically normative, a brilliant positivist sermon, can best be seen from the following consideration. It all hinged on the Verification Principle, which severely circumscribed the realm of meaning by limiting it, in effect, to that which is testable (empirically or logically). Now this can be read in a Platonic way as a discovery of the God-given or Nature-given bounds of a realm of meaning. (Ironically, it was in this spirit that some positivists read it, though of course they could not admit this to themselves.) Alternatively, it could be read, consistently with its own requirements, as a definition. It meant: that which is testable, is testable. (*Meaning* being but a conventionally established synonym for the testable, one could replace either expression by the other without loss of content, and one could, of course, apply this to the Verification Principle itself.)

The trouble is that the affirmation that the testable is the testable does not make the heart beat faster. By contrast, the Verification Principle did just that: it infuriated some and excited others. A mere repetition or tautology could not have achieved that. So how was it done? The answer is simple. It was also and primarily an *evaluation*. It commended the testable use of language and excoriated its untestable use as a piece of semantic parasitism and fraud. The linguistic formulation was a misleading irrelevancy. It only suggested that the commendation was an edict of an authority called Language (*qui est donc cette dame?*). Fortunately, Ayer is now quite clear that the lady has no such authority.

Or take another philosophical tradition with which Ayer feels profound sympathy—American Pragmatism, especially in its latest formulation in the hands of W. V. Quine. The basic difference between Quine and logical positivism (as represented, for instance, by the young Ayer) resembles the difference between reliance on a customary or common law, on the one hand, and the pursuit of a revolutionary constitution, on the other. A population that had long suffered from an arbitrary, tyrannical, capricious, and absolutist ruler may well demand a revolutionary, entrenched constitution, which will henceforth define the rights of rulers and subjects and specify sanctions that are to be invoked if those rights are violated. Yet inhabitants of a land blessed with a well-tried, effective, and ancient legal tradition may prefer to stick by it, pointing out that without such a tradition, constitutions are of little avail, and that with it, they are redundant.

Logical positivists behaved like revolutionaries eager to set up a watertight constitution, which would henceforth protect mankind from raffle and conceptual parasitism. Pragmatists, though sharing many of their values, tend to take a kind of customary, common-law, empiricist decency for granted, as self-evident and inherent in the human condition, requiring little in the way of formulation or defense. It is an interesting fact that Americans, capable of constitution-worship in politics, are quite allergic to it in the theory of knowledge. In epistemology, they seem virtually incapable of even conceiving an ancien régime and hence feel no need for drastic revolutionary and legal means for terminating it. They suppose that the unwritten empiricist constitution under which they actually live is some kind of universal state of nature. This is conspicuously true of the two most influential recent American philosophical thinkers, Quine and Noam Chomsky. Chomsky's attacks on empiricism in explanatory psychology, for instance, are parasitic on a tacit empiricism in the theory of knowledge, which is treated as so obvious as not to require formulation.

The central feature of Quine's theory of knowledge is his refusal to countenance the very notions in terms of which the positivist Code Napoleon of our cognitive comportment is to be drawn up. He refuses to allow the linkage of individual cognitive claims to identified pieces of experience. He openly spurns the Cartesian-empiricist aspiration for a revolutionary fresh start in cognition. He repudiates this "cosmic exile," as he calls it, and insists on staying within the world, as past cognitive activity has accumulated it. The real explanation, to my mind, of his attitude is not to be found in the technical reasons he ad-

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duces to show that a fresh start is not feasible—but in the nontechnical reasons he does not give, and takes for granted, for holding that such a start is not needed. All's well with the world.

A blessed intellectual tradition that does not really remember any cognitive ice age, that has no sense of any earlier stagnant period when cognition was so much at the service of noncognitive social aims that it could not ever stretch its elbows—such a tradition may well assume its own blessedly post-Enlightenment and progressive state to be the perennial and natural birthright, not just of men, but of all life. Pragmatism does precisely that. When Darwinism had made its impact, it was natural to look at the story of the evolution of life, *and* at the cognitive and economic growth of the Atlantic world in recent centuries, and to assume that the two curves were segments of one and the same continuous curve, which reflected the operation of one and the same underlying principle. There was admittedly a missing bit between the two curves, which could only be filled by interpolation, but one could assume that the data for that period would fit it when they were found—especially as one was profoundly uninterested in that period anyway. This is the underlying formula for pragmatism: biological naturalism plus recent Atlantic history provide the inspiration and the model for a general philosophy of all life and thought, the two being in any case assimilated to each other (though admittedly William James wobbled between supposing that he was explaining the nature of sound thinking as such, and of American thinking in particular). Quine says in so many words that the ideas that men "posit" in the course of history basically always serve the same end and can be judged by the same yardstick, namely their capacity to predict future experiences. The continuity of one single story is assumed. The crucial weakness of pragmatism is its inability to conceive of a radical discontinuity between the modern cumulative cognitive tradition and the thought-styles that preceded it.

But once again, we have in pragmatism a normative argument, revalidating the corpus of the current ideas of a given tradition, in bulk if not in detail, and it is achieved by an argument quite different from that employed by, for instance, the linguistic philosophers. But once again the reader might have some difficulty in discerning this underlying problem situation from the examination of the surface arguments.

Ayer's book purports to provide a kind of sequel for Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*. It has been said of that book that its author tried to provide the social context of ideas but failed. It can be said of Ayer that he has not failed because he has not even tried. The result is a somewhat discontinuous, jerky *Who's Who* of philosophical ideas of the century, a useful guide to the machinery deployed by diverse thinkers, but not really illuminating the deeper currents. Some will complain of the selectiveness of the entries: Ayer has tried to cover himself by including thinkers with whom he does not much sympathize, such as Collingwood and Heidegger, about whom he is amusingly malicious; but he could not bring himself to handle such schools of thought as the structuralists or the neo-Marxists. My own inclination would not be to complain that he had dealt with too few, but rather that he had dealt with too many. Had he but restricted himself to a continuous narrative, discussing only those thinkers with whose ideas he had really been involved, somewhat in the style of Collingwood's *Autobiography*, we might have had a more gripping account rather than the present very serviceable, but slightly lifeless, handbook.

What is lacking is a general plot of philosophy in the twentieth century. Yet in the formal introductory part of the book, Ayer does indeed single out such a theme—the study and evaluation of evidence. But unfortunately he does not pursue this very far when dealing with individual thinkers. The nature and evaluation of evidence is indeed the central concern of the tradition to which he has contributed. It has helped engender, or codify, a totally new kind of society, one inhabiting a new kind of world. A world that stands before the bar of knowledge, that recognizes the sovereignty of evidence, is radically distinct from all previous worlds, within which knowledge has been obliged to conform to the world rather than vice versa. This new and unique world is the one we live in. It was invisible to the linguistic philosophers because they

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lacked a sense of change, and to pragmatists because they lacked a sense of the discontinuity of change. This world is cursed with unique and possibly insoluble problems. Its outlines are yet to be properly charted.

"What Blurt Is This About Virtue and About Vice?"

HART CRANE AND YVOR WINTERS: THEIR LITERARY CORRESPONDENCE. *By Thomas Parkinson. University of California Press. $15.95. Paper, $6.95.*

Reviewed by REED WHITTEMORE

This volume appeared in cloth in 1978 and received a good review from Denis Donoghue in the *New York Times*, but was otherwise little noted. At about the same time a new and complete edition of Winters's poems, including his remarkable short story, "The Brink of Darkness," appeared with an introduction by Donald Davie (Carcanet Press, Manchester). Then in 1981 the *Southern Review* devoted a whole big issue to Winters. Other celebrations of one or both of these writers are occurring, and now we have the Thomas Parkinson volume before us as a paperback. I take its appearance as one more mystic sign of the literary times.

Not that the book is undeserving by itself—it is an excellent report worked up to fullness despite a bad handicap, that of not containing the Winters side of the correspondence (under wraps until 1993)—but it is essentially a book about an argument now more than fifty years old and already covered with the dust of many pedagogues. Why is it being undusted now?

My guess is that interest at the moment lies with the Winters side of the argument, with Winters playing the hero role for a group of critics who see in him a revivable model of a kind of literary thinking that has long since been attacked and left for dead by a variety of contemporary academic innovators. Whatever the revivers' commitments—and they seem to be diverse, though all vaguely anti-Craneish—the choice of Winters for such a role seems to be a matter of moment, not only for English departments but for poetry. Winters was a precise thinker about poetry (and about literature in general, though poetry was his first love); he was precise even about the limits of precision, and he wrote with eloquent clarity about some of the most troublesome matters in aesthetics. His volume of essays, *In Defense of Reason*, is a critical classic and is so despite the fact that it contains a number of judgments on specific writers so severe as to seem outrageous by intent. Winters was a tireless campaigner for principles; *In Defense of Reason* is not only a model of a kind of exegesis but also a collection of his campaign sermons. It must have been aimed, at the time (1947), at producing angry reactions from those critics whom Winters had set up as the enemy. Today the enemy has changed its spots as well as its vocabulary, but it is still a clear Wintersian enemy and still sure to be outraged if Winters should again achieve critical currency.

The tragic split between Winters and Crane occurred because of a review that Winters wrote of *The Bridge* in *Poetry* (June 1930). The correspondence leading up to that split is the central matter of the Parkinson volume and shows us, aside from the humanity of the two antagonists-to-be, how the two labored forward to the positions that we now identify with them. It is a correspondence full of terms that come flashing forth as contemporary calls to combat—the intellectual and the anti-intellectual, the rational and the intuitive, the paraphrasable and the orphic, the moral and the energized—and though Parkinson is at pains to play down the tags and show the antagonists' complexities, the tags don't go away. The two men seem fated to go down in literary history representing grand forces: two ways of art and criticism.

As pen pals they did not, Parkinson indicates, see their difference at first. Instead they were for two years (1926–28) mostly compatible, praising each other's work equably, sharing common annoyances with editors (particularly with Harriet Monroe at *Poetry* and Marianne Moore at the *Dial*), and talking shop amicably, as if indeed they had the same shop. (There was one important rift, by letter in

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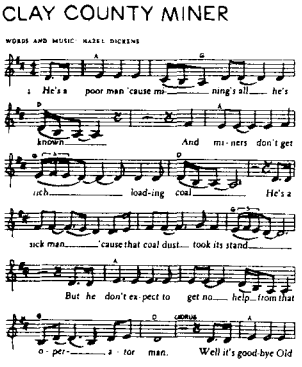

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1927, that may never have healed, but at the time seemed to have: Winters apparently complained of Crane's intemperance in sex and drink and Crane, as Parkinson put it, went for the jugular.) They met only once, at Christmas in 1927, and though Parkinson denies that they didn't hit it off, their correspondence dropped off after the meeting. It picked up again two years later when Crane was readying *The Bridge* for publication and asked Winters to review it. The review was the end of everything between them, and Crane committed suicide two and a half years later.

The review was indeed harsh, despite two or three strong compliments, and Crane's shock is understandable. After all, Winters had reviewed Crane's earlier book *White Buildings* with such extravagant praise in *Poetry* that Harriet Monroe had been impelled to meddle, appending a footnote to the review complaining that the use of the word "great" in reference to living authors was usually inappropriate. Now, suddenly, Crane read Winters describing his work as "wreckage." But for the two years before the review, Winters had been busy, as Parkinson observes, consolidating his critical principles; he may therefore have been blind to how personal his review was and may have thought of it as not only without malice but even objective and lofty. For the review *was* general in scope, though quite specific in its detailing of *The Bridge*'s faults; and during the course of the review, Winters declared to be wreckage not only the work of Crane but also the work of other writers he had previously praised. In doing so he set forth an omen-ridden prophecy of a dark future for much of the writing around him.

Let me elaborate. In the review, Winters pointed straight at the dangers, for Crane, of using his great talent haphazardly, of having "almost blind faith in moment-to-moment inspiration," and of indulging in "sentimental leniency toward his vices," a leniency that might soon make him the vices' victim. He went on to find the same leniency in "the entire body of anti-intellectualist literature of our time," and particularly in the work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts, James Joyce, and William Carlos Williams (Williams had been one of his heroes up to this point). He concluded with a characteristic Wintersian fight-talk, asserting that the dangers could and should be combated, combated by taking hold morally and intellectually of one's impulses. Crane must have taken the sermon as pointed straight at himself, although Winters in his corner probably dreamed that he was aiming at an entire body of literature.

Seventeen years later Winters rethought and elaborated on his 1930 review in an essay, "The Significance of *The Bridge* by Hart Crane, or What Shall We Do with Professor X?" in which he persisted, on the one hand, in being personal, taking Crane's suicide as a logical development of Crane's views about life and art, and on the other, in making Crane a victim of the enemy ideology Winters had now formulated thoroughly for himself. That ideology he traced back as far as Emerson but found still circulating in the irresponsibly lenient minds of teachers of American literature. Loosely, it was the inclusive, undiscriminating ideology of Whitman's "I contradict myself; very well, I contradict myself"; or perhaps it was the ideology of the Whitman who asked, "What blurt is this about virtue and about vice?"

A stern essay it is, Winters at his worst and best. And lest his rigors appear freakish, I think it important to remember at this point that by 1930—and certainly by the time of the Professor X essay in 1947—Winters had established his credentials with some of the best New Critics of the time, and that despite his preachiness, he shared with all of them an aversion to easy literary didacticism. Such an aversion was a foundation stone of the New Criticism, and Winters was a true New Critic in believing in the stone, believing that such poems as, for instance, "Say Not the Struggle Naught Availeth" were bad poems because they were *mere* preaching.

Furthermore, in his classes at Stanford, and in his writings, Winters established himself as a passionate advocate of looking at a poem in the familiar New Critical way, that is, as an organic whole. He was one of the most persistent of New Critical functionalists in studying how various elements of a poem did or did not contribute to the total statement of a poem.

Yet he was so inclusively functional in his view of a poem's workings—and here is where his trouble with Crane must have begun—that he imposed moral functions on a poem, and therefore on a poet, where other New Critics did not. In essence, a poem for

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him was a struggle against darkness, the darkness of no meaning; and that struggle, though verbal and aesthetic, was also as moral as an old-time struggle with the devil, a struggle in which one sought to *control* meaning.

Winters seems to have had a deep personal need for asserting control over his life as well as his art, a need proceeding from a fear of losing control, perhaps even of going mad. (Terry Comito has some interesting perceptions about this tension in Winters in an essay on Winters's story, "The Brink of Darkness," in the *Southern Review* issue devoted to Winters.) But whatever his psychic need, his constant literary need was for rational control of any literary work that happened to be before him. He insisted that such control *was* a moral imperative, and he did not let his students and readers forget the imperative for a moment. He would therefore be wholly at odds, were he alive now, with most of the new breeds of critic frequenting MLA meetings—let me call them all post–New Critics—and would find their faults even more dangerous than those of poor Professor X.

In the first place he would not be able to read the writings of most of them. He would not think they spoke his language—and indeed they do not, since he spoke a language that was remarkably clean and clear, containing little technical verbiage. He would find them to be, at every turn, obscurantist.

In the second place he would see in their verbal murk a deeper murk, a murk of thought, especially about the meaning of meaning—or should I say the purport of purport? Winters had a great interest in the tenuousness of meaning, but his control imperatives told him steadily that no human action was more crucial than fighting the tenuousness and reaching for definition, distinction, clarified value; and of course for a long time now the critical drift has been away from attempting such de-murking. Not many post–New Critics seem prepared to acknowledge, for example, that literary meaning is still importantly resident in what is called, of course simplistically, "statement." Walking through English department corridors, I sometimes get the impression that nobody in the neighborhood, poet or critic, has believed in "statement" for years.

Winters did. Passionately. Winters was sure he knew meaning when he saw it—and knew the absence of meaning or the obscuring of meaning when he saw it; and in reaching for knowledge about meaning and for the control of meaning, he infallibly reached first for a literary work's "statement." With such a conviction he was of course a partisan of paraphrase. One of his students, Turner Cassity (in an interesting reminiscence in the *Southern Review*), said that in sessions with him there was "seldom any argument over the doctrine of paraphrasable content," and that "if a poem had no content he made short work of it." He would be very poor company these days for up-to-date post–New Critics because he would discourse on how a poet should whittle out a statement that would be what he *meant*.

In affirming unequivocally a poem's primal dependence, not upon expression, verbal electricity, archetypal gutturals, or whatnot, but simply upon clear statement, he went considerably beyond most other New Critics of his time, especially beyond his friend Allen Tate; but in doing so he did not thereby desert the New Critic camp. I assume, therefore, that the current revival of interest in Winters is, at least partly, a recognition of that fact, a recognition by an annoyed new generation of old New Critics that Winters is, despite his excesses, one of Them. Hence his revival could represent the fumbling beginning of a movement, for who knows what might happen after poems are allowed to say things once again. We might even have a little moral rearmament! Lord knows we could use it.

The Skeptic and the Bible

THE STORY OF THE STORIES: THE CHOSEN PEOPLE AND ITS GOD. *By Dan Jacobson. Harper & Row. $11.95.*

Reviewed by JUDAH GOLDIN

Dan Jacobson says that God did not choose Israel; rather Israel chose him and then said he chose them. The Israelites invented him by projecting into their myth of deity the whole package of fears and fantasies, sense of

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guilt and hopes (especially during and after national disasters), imaginings and perplexities to which they were subject. What was inside their lively and restless minds they attributed to a Yahweh of their own making (name and all?), their own and his displeasures and pleasures. So that if we ask why he chose the Israelites as his special possession,

> the short answer to this question is that he chose them because they wanted to believe that they had been chosen. They invented him, one can say, *so that* they might be chosen. They wanted to be exalted above other nations—"high above . . . in praise and in fame and in honour" (Deuteronomy 26:19)—and they ascribed precisely that ambition on their behalf to the most exalted being it was possible for them to conceive. From their belief in the intentions he nourished on their behalf, they derived a sense of inner strength and cohesion which they could not have got from any other source: a conviction of their own superiority over all the nations who had not been chosen [like the children of the Ethiopians? Amos 9:7].

Although Deuteronomy 26:19, which has just been cited, goes on to conclude, "and that you shall be a people holy to the Lord your God, as he has spoken," Dan Jacobson's argument is not discredited. But if "Yahweh's status as a fiction" equals all the desires and ambitions of the Israelites, why should holiness be presented as a climax? What's so irresistible about holiness?

Holiness is far from a simple concept, as any good biblical encyclopedia will explain (my own preference is for the Hebrew *Entziqlopedia Miqrait*, 7:44ff.). Whatever else the concept implies, one of its principal implications is "keeping separate from," already noted by the second century A.D. by talmudic teachers. (See also Leviticus 20:26.) Now, that a tiny people would wish for praise and fame and honor, and even masochistically for punishment when it transgresses, and for forgiveness, and for ultimate triumph over its enemies is understandable. But holiness, separation from all the mighty, super-powerful neighbors? I'd have expected the reverse. Keep me weak? *Is this Bontsche Schweig nationalism?*

However, this is to engage in argument over what psychology reveals or does not reveal. Hence, even as the traditional theological approach fails to answer many questions, so too does the psychological approach, which often amounts to transposition from major to minor key or to the fashionable nostalgia of our times: Give me Yiddish but deliver me from the religion.

My point is that psychology provides us with no better explanations for the ingredients of revealed religion than does traditional theology. Nor does psychology make it clear how a particular, whole people united to produce their Yahweh. A show of hands at Mount Sinai? Judah Halevi (circa 1075–1141) once observed that 600,000 Israelites witnessed the revelation at Sinai, and it is preposterous to assume that 600,000 could have plotted to manufacture a falsehood. Has psychological invention of Yahweh offered a less dubious proof? And considering what human relationships are like, and not merely in their hideous phases, why frequently this passion to prove we are not chosen? Such extreme modesty is suspicious.

In his concern with "the chosen people and its god," as he puts it in his subtitle, Jacobson does his best not to overlook the elements of self-criticism—and even fairness in judgment of the stranger—accompanying the notion of chosenness, and not merely accompanying it but amalgamating with it. He is right to quote at length from Deuteronomy and the Prophets to underscore that, even when Israel is denounced, the rewarding assumptions of chosenness are not abandoned, not even by the hard-to-please prophets. Further, Jacobson does not fail to emphasize that the conviction of being divinely chosen, "this mode of presenting history[,] is itself predicated on a sense of the unity of human experience which runs deeper than the writers wholly realized." (How does he know, one wonders, what the writers wholly realized?)

> For all that is apparently remorseless and mechanical about their vision of history as a dramatic series of reversals of fortune, which could come to an end in a dream world effectively outside or beyond time—or perhaps because of the remorseless and mechanical manner in which it operates—this vision actually cuts radically across the writers' conviction of the unique status of their people. . . . In certain unexpected, hidden ways . . . it questions the uniqueness of Israel, if only by demonstrating again how equivocal were the ways of its God. The weapon of vicissitude [his design is our coinci-

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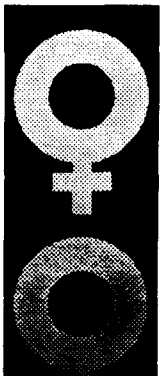

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dence?] would never leave his hand. It was to be used against all people, his favorites not excluded (page 129; see also page 135).

(There is a *lapsus calami* on page 133; it should read Hosea rather than Amos.) Even for a God who is not a fiction, this is impressive.

So, too, the discussion of what Jacobson calls the principle of reciprocity, tit for tat; measure for measure, the rabbis called it—which may in fact be viewed as a manifestation of God's justice, according to the Israelites, that his punishments are presumably not in excess of the crime; indeed, true or not, the principle is not only Israel's.

All of this is to oversimplify; it is to look at the concept of a choosing God in Israel as though it were entirely idiosyncratic. At least for "the Persian period, the Jews were the first of all peoples we know to open wide the gates to proselytes." These words are Elias Bickerman's, who continues, "Every ancient cult was exclusive; none but the members of a family participated in the worship of its tutelary gods; no foreigner was able to sacrifice to the deities of a city." There is more, but the passage is too long to quote; nevertheless it should be consulted (in L. Finkelstein, *The Jews*, volume 1, page 76) and meditated on for historical perspective before psychological exegesis.

Which does not mean that independent analysis is out of order or that the Jewish idea of chosenness is commonplace and of minor import. But since the notion of chosenness is coupled with specific demands and obligations in the Prophets and Pentateuch too, let alone in early post-biblical, rabbinic formulations, we may well be dealing with Israel's possibly unique understanding of what it means to be chosen. Chosenness is related to the doctrine of reward and punishment. As an expression of the teaching of reward and punishment, eschatological triumph and defeat may use feverish vocabulary and imagery that favor the deserving, or those who think they are deserving if they are not self-righteous or complacent. In teachings of reward and punishment, to be bland is to be dilettante, or as impartial as the United Nations. But in the complexities of daily life, at least in Israel, selection was for a massive task, not a patriotic cheer (see Jeremiah 7:4). Once you adopt this view, the land, the foods, the relationships are expected to adjust to it.

With none of this, I think, does Dan Jacobson disagree (although I'm not sure that he would be ready to grant the inevitability of land, foods, and relationships). He grows eloquent as he states his conviction of the remarkable nature of the Hebrew scriptures, "not so much the idea of God choosing Israel for his own, and the description of the ways in which he makes his choice manifest, but the profoundly energizing uneasiness about the moral implications of the entire process which the story reveals overall. In its way that seems to me quite as original, and as provocative, morally speaking, as what the story tells us of the qualities that enable God to exercise choice: his invisibility, his transcendence, and his solitude." And there is more, and more moving, as he approaches the end of his book.

It is astonishing to note how many of the questions raised by skeptics have already been raised by the ancients ("*If true, not new; if new, not true*," as Jacobson writes in italics at the very beginning of his acknowledgments), and their answers have attached themselves to our understanding of the text: that being chosen is utterly meaningless, if not savage, without a demanding moral purpose; that a prophet is not one who chooses to be a prophet, but one who is chosen, and some wish they never had been chosen; that not political science but virtue must serve as domestic and foreign policy of the state ("virtue" must include the determination to follow the prophet's prudent counsel [see Isaiah 7]; the "prudence" of the prophets deserves more attention than it receives); that to speak of Yahweh's will is to keep in mind that that will refers to the whole orbit of human conduct, not just to the ritualistic or cultic circumference, but to the rational one as well (see Ezekiel 20:32). The skeptic brings no more illumination to the story of the stories than the believer who chooses Yahweh's autonomous choice.

Such emphasis and such imperatives, *in their totality* (not some accidental or isolated parallel), don't ordinarily originate in human society left to itself. If I follow Jacobson's advice to heed D. H. Lawrence's dictum—

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"Never trust the teller; trust the tale"—then the skepticism hardly diminishes the force and affirmation of the literary record. Paradoxically it even magnifies the dimensions of the miraculous—that from human imaginings exclusively such an extraordinary body of teachings could grow and persevere. But skepticism—it's not I harping on this; it's the author who repeatedly keeps reminding his readers of what he is—while it has its role to play, does not contribute anything fundamental to our understanding of the singular intersecting of world view and Zion view of the literature of the Hebrew Bible. In part, I think, Jacobson also senses this as he approaches the end of the volume: "To a skeptical reader the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures remain a unique revelation only in the most obvious sense: as a revelation of the minds of particular and extraordinary men in a sequence of times and places. . . . Even beyond this . . . the Scriptures are a revelation of how mysterious and terrible a place the world can appear to be, as a moral and physical fact, to those who open themselves wholly to it. As we read, we do not know whether to wonder more at the God they present in all his different manifestations, or at the men whose minds and imaginations made room for him." At this point skepticism seems to have embarrassed itself into a corner; and to talk of skepticism and faith, as though they were easily divisible from each other, becomes almost pointless.

Uptown

THIS WAS HARLEM, 1900–1950. *By Jervis Anderson. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $17.95.*

Reviewed by OSCAR HANDLIN

Suddenly, a long-awaited outburst of creativity made the place familiar—not only to black people, but to all Americans and to others far beyond the nation's borders. In the second decade of the twentieth century, a new community arose, showed remarkable signs of self-organization, developed a coherent set of insitutions, and found expression in vibrant cultural forms. Manifestations of the Harlem Renaissance appeared before the First World War; they became clear in the 1920s; and they endured through the depression of the 1930s. Music, art, and literature were the most widely perceived forms of creativity. But religion and politics also gave evidence of communal vitality. The Renaissance lasted a generation, then grew dim, changed its form, and finally flickered out. Its rise and fall provides the material for an exciting story.

This is the story Jervis Anderson does not tell. This vigorous and perceptive writer has done some research and has checked most of his facts. But he does not ask the right questions and therefore fails to come up with meaningful answers.

The book reflects its origin in a series of *New Yorker* articles; and it has the virtues but also the vices of that medium. It is interesting; it is undemanding—the reader can drift from sentence to sentence without reflection. But the book lacks continuity and conveys little sense of chronology. It contains, properly speaking, no chapters, but falls into six unequal parts, each divided into from three to nine segments, a total of thirty-nine segments, averaging nine pages in length. Each of the numerous bits can be read without reference to what precedes or follows it; and the order of presentation is almost irrelevant. Names, heaped together in long lists, and abundant block quotations are evidence that often the author pasted up material snipped from elsewhere. Thus, a whole segment of part 2, "Harlem at Sixteen," simply summarizes an article by the Reverend Charles Martin.

The flawed organization obscures significant long-term issues. Though suggestive insights now and then appear, nothing comes of them. Anderson discusses intelligently efforts to establish a black theater in Harlem. Of demands that the Lafayette Players produce black dramas he comments that none were being written, and he notes that when the black experience did become a subject for the stage, it was in the plays by white authors. Why? The answer, or even the consideration of such questions, surely relevant to the community's culture, is entirely lacking.

OSCAR HANDLIN, Carl H. Pforzheimer University Professor at Harvard University, is the author of many historical works, including, most recently, *The Distortion of America.*

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Wild interpretive judgments reveal more serious journalistic faults. Early on, the book slides by the meaning of the Reverend Charles Parkhurst's crusade against vice, and inaccurately implies that nothing came of it. Tempted by a facile comparison with Victorian London, Anderson applies to Parkhurst another writer's suggestion that William E. Gladstone's personal crusade against prostitution was a quaint method of sublimation that permitted him "to take his lust and live his life of dedicated respectability." The statement is dubious even when confined to Gladstone. There is absolutely no justification for extending it to Parkhurst. And the diversion it creates draws attention away from what was happening on the sidewalks of New York. Mamie Smith "made so much money she never really counted it." Because she was black, a singer, formerly poor, or just Mamie Smith? Again, "of all the art forms in Harlem, poetry and fiction were the hardest hit by the Depression"—this written of the time when Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison arrived and when the WPA's Federal Writers' Project sustained many. Too often the good story is more important than the quality of the evidence, as in the account Anderson offers of the black preacher and the numbers game, or as in much that he says of the effects of Prohibition.

Black Harlem was the product of a continuing process that reordered New York's population as the metropolis spread out. Black people had resided in the city since the seventeenth century and, like other groups, had moved about from area to area as opportunity dictated. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the West Side vicinity of the old Tenderloin district held the largest concentration of blacks in Manhattan. Many of them began to move uptown to the superior residential space of Harlem. Construction of Pennsylvania Station and of its links to New Jersey and Long Island hastened the shift, for the lines ran right through the old neighborhood.

The relatively moderate pace of that movement accelerated after the outbreak of the First World War as thousands of newcomers migrated from the South. Harlem was then not a refuge of desperation but a magnet drawing people to it by opportunity and by the order of a thriving community. In time it attracted newcomers not only from the old plantation region, but also from the West and from the Caribbean. It was the goal of a persistent quest because it provided scope for a meaningful life in the two postwar decades. Arna Bontemps, arriving from California in 1924, was not alone in finding in Harlem "a foretaste of paradise."

The infusion of energy contributed by the new arrivals exerted a multiplying effect at all levels of society. The excitement, the sense of openness, and the glimpse of unexpected possibilities pulled at young blacks throughout the country and seemed validated by the flow of people into the community.

Growth was not anarchic. Viewed from the perspective of more recent decades, the order was astounding, sustained by a social infrastructure of families and churches that established norms of behavior and set sanctions against deviance. Outsiders passed in and out of the community without danger or sense of danger—indeed, without surprise or even notice.

Anderson is aware of Harlem's literary and musical contacts with downtown and downtowners, but pays no attention to contacts with folk nearby. Edging up to the black areas was a growing concentration of Puerto Ricans and a Jewish settlement still substantial in numbers. The lives of these people crisscrossed in streets and subways, in shops and schools, with little friction. They had the mutual understanding derived from the fact that they were all relative newcomers to the place, that they were all targets of racism, and that they shared a pluralistic conception of American society. The friendship of Horace Kallen and Alain Locke was emblematic to the extent that both took heart from the belief that men and women of diverse antecedents could retain their cultural differences yet live harmoniously together. When Arthur Schomburg began his collection of black history, he expected it to document that vision of the American past.

Complex internal and external forces after 1945 swept away the sense of order and transformed the old Harlem. The permissiveness and affluence of the wider society seeped into the smaller one. The difference between the young Adam Clayton Powell and his father

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demonstrated the extent to which the role of the churches changed; less of the old-time gospel and morality, more of the stylish life and politics. Public housing, one of the great reforms of the Progressive Era, emptied the streets and sapped the vitality of community life in the high-rise canyons. Fear intruded and outsiders stayed away.

Integration remained the civil rights goal; but separatism was increasingly the reality, sustained by pride and by the practical advantages of affirmative action on the part of blacks, by guilt and the sense of excessive pressure on the part of whites. For Harlem, also, the jerky progress toward equality had paradoxical effects. It lost its preeminence as the goal for aspiring youth and a creaming-off effect deprived it of those who rose in social status. The intellectuals dispersed when places opened up in universities throughout the country and middle-class and professional people found other, more pleasant residential areas, free of bias, while the residue with all its social problems remained. Harlem then drifted toward ghetto status with all of its attendant difficulties. This dramatic story remains to be told.

Under The Transom

BOOKS: THE CULTURE AND COMMERCE OF PUBLISHING. *By Lewis A. Coser, Charles Kadushin, and Walter W. Powell. Basic Books. $19.*

Reviewed by DORIS L. EDER

Books: The Culture and Commerce of Publishing is the most objective, thorough, and comprehensive study of the publishing industry produced to date. It is the product of five years' research—by Lewis Coser, Charles Kadushin, and Walter Powell, sociologists and intellectual or cultural historians—and is based upon methodical analysis and surveys of forty or so publishing houses and formal interviews with eighty-five editors. The authors concentrate on adult trade, college text, scholarly/scientific, and university press publishing, unlike Thomas Whiteside in his *Blockbuster Complex*, which concentrates on the mass-market paperback scene. Coser, Kadushin, and Powell trace important trends and developments in publishing over the past two decades, bringing their study up to the end of the seventies.

The conflict or tension epitomized in the book's subtitle between two different kinds of value has always been implicit in American culture and is a theme running through the book. The authors point out that, although American publishing has always had a blatantly commercial side, in its evolution from a personal to a cottage to a now highly bureaucratized, computerized industry, its obsession with the bottom line has come to preempt all but financial considerations. Nor is the urge to merge new in publishing, but the rate at which mergers took place and conglomerates arose in the sixties and seventies *is* new and phenomenal. As a result of independent houses becoming public-stock companies and of corporate mergers between publishing and the communications, electronics, and entertainment industries, a sharply dual market has emerged, in which publishers have become either very large or very small. Similarly, books these days tend to have either mass appeal or limited, specialized appeal. A displacement of the middle has occurred, whereby the medium-sized house, like the mid-list book, has all but vanished; for the one cannot compete with giants, the other with blockbusters. The drive toward ever-increasing size and quantity of sales results from the desire to minimize risks and maximize profits by making taste homogeneous and injecting predictability into a very uncertain and capricious market. A tendency toward oligopoly is particularly noticeable in mass-market paperback publishing, where the eight largest houses transact 80 percent of the business, and in college textbook publishing, where the top 20 percent share 90 percent of total sales, and the big four (Prentice-Hall, McGraw-Hill, CBS Educational and Professional Publishing, and Scott, Foresman) together account for 40 percent. But the authors insist that publishing remains a highly diversified industry, with considerable differentiation among its different sectors.

Every year forty thousand books are pub-

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lished in the United States, of which thirty thousand are new titles. What is surprising is that trade publishing—hardcover general-interest books (not mass-market paperbacks or scholarly and specialized books)—generates less than a quarter of all sales. Yet both trade and mass-market paperback publishing loom largest because they are the most dramatic and uncertain sectors of the industry, where risks and rewards are palpably greatest. Different sectors of publishing are characterized by different priorities, timelines, financial constraints, and modes of transacting business. College-text publishing, like trade, is big business with large initial outlays, sizable promotion costs, print runs, and break-even points, but textbook publishing offers a more certain arena than trade publishing. Textbook publishers enjoy close relationships with their clients, who are schoolteachers and the academic professoriat, and are thus able to plan their marketing and gauge revenues to a nicety. Not so in trade and mass-market paperback publishing, where sales are pure guesswork, the rate of returns is still a whopping 35 to 55 percent, and wastage is phenomenal. Close to half of all mass-market paperbacks are remaindered and pulped every year—a hundred million volumes in all! A kind of "money censorship" as a result of the decision to publish only books of which a certain sales volume can be guaranteed is common to both trade and text publishing. In trade, sales of ten to fifty thousand copies enable publishers to break even; in textbook publishing, figures vary between twenty and fifty thousand copies. In both, standardization of taste is apparent. Quantity and quality often vary inversely as a result of the appeal to the lowest common denominator of taste. College textbook publishers have for a decade concentrated on introductory texts for multisection courses, published in huge quantities and revised every two or three years to prevent students—and now professors—from trafficking in used texts. Since the late sixties, "managed" texts, produced by teams of graduate-student researchers, free-lance writer-editors, and academic "stars" who lend their names to such projects, have proliferated, offering pap or popularized overviews of basic disciplines. "Managed" texts are the ultimate example of the tail wagging the dog: instead of authors writing books and seeking publishers to print and market them, publishers research markets and manufacture books to fit them. Scholarly publishing, which is more sizable than one might expect, constitutes the most autonomous and conservative sector of the publishing industry; scholarly editors are less bureaucratized and exercise more editorial control than their counterparts in trade and textbook publishing. Compared with trade and mass-market paperback publishers, scholarly publishers take longer views, deal in smaller royalties, print runs, and sales, and maintain back lists with the intention of selling books gradually but steadily over a period of years. This is a quieter, more staid corner of publishing; even here, though, there is a predisposition toward known quantities, a cleaving to "name" authors from the best schools and colleges, and a corresponding unwillingness to publish unknowns from less prestigious institutions.

The general effects of publishing's increasing size and bureaucratization have made themselves felt in all sectors of the industry. By and large, editors have been forced to become more managerial, more accountable for the profitability of their books. As a result of their increased managerial responsibilities, editors have to spend more time politicking for their books within the house, which means they have less time and energy to spend with authors working on manuscripts. Therefore, relations between editors and authors have become more strained and even sometimes adversary; authors must reluctantly commit their cherished brainchildren to specialized publishing assembly lines, often labyrinthine in complexity. An author's manuscript is successively handed from editor to copy editors, designers, marketing and sales people, with whom an author may only with difficulty communicate or make contact. (Coser, Kadushin, and Powell found that—despite the current obsession with profits—editors, because of production time lags, often remain remarkably uninformed about the sales of the books they sign up.) As they have with authors, editors' relations with critics and reviewers have grown more tenuous. Agents have, on the other hand, become an increasingly important resource for editors, serving to screen, short-list, and place manuscripts. If edito-

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rial power and autonomy within publishing houses has declined, that of the handlers of subsidiary rights has increased because of closer ties between the publishing and entertainment industries. At the end of the publishing process, chain stores such as B. Dalton and Waldenbooks have become a force to conjure with. Setting out in the sixties with only a half-dozen or so stores, these chains now have close to a thousand branches nationwide; during the eighties they expect to capture 50 percent of the mass paperback market. A huge, complex interdependency has arisen between mass-market publishers and these chains, orders from whom can make or break a book—as can adoption, in the case of novels, by the movies or television.

Providing a map of four diverse areas of publishing, *Books* traces important trends and indicates where the industry is headed. The authors do not anticipate many more mergers, nor do they foresee independents or medium-sized houses making a comeback. Publishing will remain a diverse, volatile, high-turnover enterprise, with a large and well-educated reserve labor force of overworked, underpaid people, mostly women. A chapter on women in book publishing by Michele Caplette points out that, though careers in publishing are not well marked, they are clearly sex-typed. Thus, women are most often promoted—if they are—from secretarial to editorial positions; few make it into executive jobs. Men move from sales to acquisitions to executive status. Though women outnumber men two to one in the editorial ranks, men outnumber women three to one in sales. Men continue to be much better paid than women, even when they are doing comparable work.

As a sociological study, *Books* often makes dry reading and is so organized that it cannot avoid repetition. It is far from the gee-whiz investigative reporting and name dropping of *The Blockbuster Complex*. But *Books* is filled with valuable information and advice. The authors' best advice to would-be authors is summarized thus: "If the reader who is unfamiliar with publishing takes but one message away from this book, it should be that formal channels of manuscript submission are the very last resort of would-be authors. To get a book published, recommendation through an informal circle or network is close to being an absolute necessity." Manuscripts sent in over the transom—that is, unsolicited—stand only a fifteen-thousand-to-one chance of ever getting into print, according to Daniel Menaker's "Unsolicited, Unloved MSS," an article cited by Coser, Kadushin, and Powell, which recently appeared in the *New York Times Book Review*. The authors of *Books* found that a house such as Doubleday, for example, receives as many as ten thousand unsolicited manuscripts a year and that editors, on the average, receive about one thousand a year. Agents serve as dikes or floodgates to control and channel this tide. Even agents usually have to try more than a dozen times before they place manuscripts with publishers, but their batting average is very much better than that of authors unaided by contacts within the publishing industry. Manuscripts forwarded to editors with recommendations stand a one-in-ten chance of getting published. So the message to aspiring authors is unequivocal: research the publishing houses and their lists and personnel; make contacts; and send your manuscripts to those places where they have a fighting chance.

In Black and White

RUNNING TIME: FILMS OF THE COLD WAR. *By Nora Sayre. Dial. $17.95.*

Reviewed by PETER SHAW

Hollywood movies have moved through phases roughly corresponding to the decades by which we like to measure cultural developments. During the war years of the 1940s, the movies' patriotic depictions of the war and the home front directly mirrored history. Previously, during the Depression years of the 1930s, Hollywood more often provided not a mirror of reality but rather an escape from it in stylish comedies and musicals. The late 1940s took up disturbing social and psychological themes in what now strikes us as a delayed reaction to the horrors of the Second World War. In the 1950s, the years of cold war, the Korean War, economic expansion, and overall

PETER SHAW's most recent book is *American Patriots and the Rituals of Revolution.*

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stability, movies were no less characterized by conflicting themes than the times were.

For Nora Sayre, movies of the 1950s represent a lamentable falling off from the sophistication of the 1930s and the social consciousness of the late 1940s. She finds the source of decline in what she regards as the political defects of the age: a "reflex" of aversion to the Soviet Union and a related "illusion" of internal danger from American Communists. She concludes that congressional investigations of domestic communism, especially those leading to the Hollywood blacklist, inculcated a fearful atmosphere that induced movie producers to abandon controversial subjects and social criticism; at the same time producers felt it necessary to wave the flag with crudely propagandistic movies about the Communist menace.

In his recent book, *Naming Names*, Victor Navasky, who has contributed a blurb to Sayre's book jacket, wrote that "it is simplistic to single out the blacklist, as its victims did at the time, as sole cause of the decline of the American movies in the fifties." Nora Sayre does not reduce everything to the blacklist, yet she consistently sees cold war politics as the ultimate influence on movies of the 1950s.

Sayre is at her best in wry descriptions of Hollywood stereotypes. Movie Communists "walk on a forward slant" and exhale very slowly when smoking. Cheap women "handled their fur stoles with abandon, and were unreasonably impatient in traffic jams." In Bible movies "the revealing costumes of Egyptian royalty resemble twentieth-century loungewear." She also has a sharp eye for the clichés and cheap effects used in science fiction movies. When it comes to the political and cultural sources of these styles, however, each of them proves susceptible to rather different interpretations from her own.

Sayre speaks of the "right-wing perspective of most science fiction movies," for example. Their creatures from outer space, she argues, were metaphors for Communists. Yet in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), the moral of the tale, heavily laid on though it may be, has less to do with projected fears than with basic human values and the capacity for love. The townspeople whose bodies are taken over by alien powers remain indistinguishable from their former selves except for a subtle absence of affect deriving from a loss of feelings. The most stunning moment in the movie comes when the hero, fleeing from the alien-humans with his beloved, feels an uncannily empty response when he kisses her and realizes that she, too, has been transformed. The Communist menace does not hover over this movie so much as does that other concern of fifties' thinkers: soulless conformity.

Regarding the Bible movies, Sayre argues that the "Roman and Egyptian despots" were meant to stand for "the Kremlin." But as Thomas H. Pauly has pointed out in an article in *Prospects*, the annual of American cultural studies, other retrospective interpretations have been put forward. Michael Wood, for example, took the biblical movie wars, in which commoners always fight against tyranny, as metaphors for the American Revolution. Pauly himself advances a cultural phenomenon of the 1950s as the key: the revival of religion. This revival may, indeed, have been a product of the Communist scare. But in the movies, at least, as Pauly phrases it, the Christians—who stand for the Americans—do not react to totalitarianism with hysteria but instead "stand up for international peace, civic responsibility, and familial love."

About big-business movies Sayre writes that "after the House Committee on Un-American Activities had disciplined Hollywood, and Ayn Rand had decried the image of industrialists as 'crooks' and 'chiselers,' no American movie was going to suggest that business was unchaste." But she then concedes that several notable movies did make this suggestion. These liberal, anti-business movies, however, disappoint her by not going far enough—that is, "they hardly criticize the system."

Here and elsewhere Ayn Rand stands out as the most sinister intellectual force of the age. *The Fountainhead* (1949), Rand's screenplay from her own novel and notoriously one of Hollywood's talkiest and most preposterous movies, is the only un-liberal, big-business movie discussed in *Running Time*. This saga of a fiercely independent modern architect, based on the career of Frank Lloyd Wright, is obviously more concerned to mouth Ayn Rand's ideas than it is to dramatize either its story or the ideas themselves. And yet for all

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its faults, the movie amounts to a familiar enough saga of beleaguered individualism. In the role of the architect, Gary Cooper stands alone, very much as he does in *High Noon*—a movie praised by Sayre (and which she explains was written by one of the Hollywood Ten as a "parable of the Committee's onslaught on Hollywood").

The publisher in *The Fountainhead,* who is Cooper's rival in love, is treated as harshly as any big businessman in a movie of the 1950s. To indicate that Ayn Rand's prescriptions for movie making are beneath contempt, Sayre quotes them without comment: "Don't give your character—as a sign of villainy, as a damning characteristic—a desire to make money"; "throw into the ashcan, where it belongs, every story that smears industrialists." Yet it must be said that these formulas make for quite respectable aesthetic doctrine, and that despite its artistic failure, *The Fountainhead* was true to them. The movie consistently treats the loathed industrialist as a man rather than a stereotype.

(In her haste to condemn *The Fountainhead,* Sayre commits an uncharacteristic error. Opposite the page on which she spoofs Cooper's efforts as an architect, she supplies a full-page photograph of him looking at a drawing scrawled over with the words "not built." But she has evidently forgotten that this drawing is not his own. In contrast to it, most of Cooper's own designs rather convincingly resemble the Frank Lloyd Wright style.)

Sayre makes *A Face in the Crowd* an exception to the rule that "few movies had examined monsters of the media." She points out that this movie was a case of Hollywood attacking its great rival, television. Yet this is to forget *Sweet Smell of Success* (which she mentions in another context), a movie that gives a chilling picture of public relations and the sinister power of a Walter Winchell–like gossip columnist. It also omits *The Great Man*, a denigrating account of an Arthur Godfrey–like career in radio; *The Bad and the Beautiful*, a portrait of a ruthless movie producer; and *The Hucksters*, which attacks the advertising business. The acerbic, skeptical view of business and success expressed in all of these movies is best described not as being exceptional but as a cliché of the age. The same cliché served as the basis for the humor in *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter*, a notable exception to Sayre's observation that comedy, too, fell off in the 1950s.

In *Sweet Smell of Success*, the anti-media bias is carried to the point where an otherwise tightly written script is allowed to wander awkwardly out of its way. When the gossip columnist sets out to ruin someone with a smear, he makes him out to be both a user of marijuana and a Communist sympathizer. Eventually the columnist arranges the arrest of his victim on a trumped-up drug charge, so that his scare-tactic use of communism is revealed to have been a screenwriter's superfluous but apparently surefire way of indicating evil.

Movies of the 1950s, rather than being reflections of "the conservative values of the decade," typically contained an oppositionist brand of liberalism. Sayre inadvertently indicates as much when she disapproves of the movies' attitudes toward women, homosexuals, blacks, and youth. For to say, as she does, that today "the spectators' small sounds of disbelief reveal how radically our attitudes toward heroism or the races or the sexes have altered," is to allow that what she now finds unacceptable is a matter of perspective.

For example, movie women of the 1950s not only continued their 1930s roles as feisty, independent business owners and managers, but emerged as sexually aggressive and complex. Though their needs were hardly approved, they were at least revealed. Thus in *Phone Call From a Stranger,* a routine movie of 1952, Bette Davis, a married woman who has herself had an affair, tells a cuckolded man that many women, but "only the strongest men," can sustain the shock of a spouse's infidelity. Her implied views of men, women, and adultery may seem merely conventional from the perspective of the 1980s, but at the time they were progressive. Indeed, the enlightened attitudes of the time were the direct precursors of Nora Sayre's own liberalism.

Whenever her political convictions are held in abeyance, Sayre's guide to the movies of the 1950s remains reliable and fair-minded. She does not hesitate to declare that "sermonizing had been a characteristic of the liberal films of the Fifties," or to find wanting movies whose intentions she approves. Thus she calls the explicitly anti anti-Communist *Storm*

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Center a "modest, simpleminded film." And though she says that "no one wrote more passionately patriotic movies than American Communists did in wartime," she calls Dalton Trumbo and Edward Dmytryk's *Tender Comrade* (1944) "probably the most asphyxiating of the wartime uplift movies."

Unfortunately, Sayre sometimes feels compelled to give high marks for good intentions. She details the "ineptitudes" of the one independently made, explicitly radical movie of the 1950s, the heavy-handed strike saga *Salt of the Earth*. But because it "challenged the system," she suggests that if one "accepts the movie's flaws, one can be moved by certain passages—and astounded by the level of its feminism." She writes that *Mission to Moscow* (1942), the movie that condoned the Moscow trials and made Joseph Stalin into a genial, soulful, caring leader, "does merit J. Edgar Hoover's charge that it was 'a prostitution of historical fact.' " But she then elevates the movie for having "sought to promote cordiality abroad," whereas, in her view, "the red-flogging movies tried to inspire hatred at home."

Yet it was not so much bad intentions as good ones that produced the poor movies of the 1950s. Earnestness, a willed piety, the laboring of the obvious, corny morality, preachiness, and uplift—all these reflected good-hearted, progressive ideals. The stilted, unconvincing quality of movies compared with the fluid and sophisticated 1930s surely reflected the age, as Sayre contends. But the connections were not as direct as she assumes. For it has to be pointed out that the movies made by Hollywood radicals fully adopted the period's slow-moving, obvious, hortatory style.

Furthermore, the radicals' labored agitprop reached back into the propaganda movies they had made in the 1940s and forward to the anti-war and other progressive movies that they made after getting their jobs back in the 1960s. Thus one has to conclude that it was not a particular attitude toward the cold war that produced the 1950s movie aesthetic but something deeper in the culture and something more basic to the evolution of movies themselves.

Sayre is aware of both the lingering influence of the 1940s and the still more important influence of television, to which she briefly traces the decline of sophistication in the 1950s movies. The period's colorful spectaculars in CinemaScope were calculated to offer something not available on a small black-and-white screen, while slow-moving action and repetitive themes were geared to the presumably inattentive television audience.

The cold war undoubtedly affected the movies, as it did much else in the 1950s. But moviemakers reacted far less often with the fear of communism suggested by Sayre's subtitle, *Films of the Cold War*, than they did with liberal formulas: guilt over atomic testing (*Them!*), over racism (*Crossfire*), and over other forms of discrimination, along with anti-capitalism and anti-militarism. To characterize the 1950s and its movies as monolithically conservative, except for a few beleaguered radical spirits, is to revive the black-and-white terms of social criticism typical of the period itself.

Their Town

SPECIAL PLACES: IN SEARCH OF SMALL TOWN AMERICA. *By Berton Roueché. Little, Brown. $12.95.*

Reviewed by JAMES KAUFMANN

Talk about small towns is much like talk in small towns: there's a lot of it, and not a great deal of it is confined to fact. Small towns are described as places where quintessentially American values are acquired. The list of said values reads much like something to which boy scouts would aspire, and of course it's true in part—stereotypes and generalizations are not immaculately conceived, and neither are idealized creations like *Our Town*. In any case, America has grown from small towns; America is a good country and Americans are good people; therefore small towns are good. Or so that line of reasoning goes.

Then the other shoe drops. Sinclair Lewis tells us in *Main Street* that Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, "is America," but his illustrations

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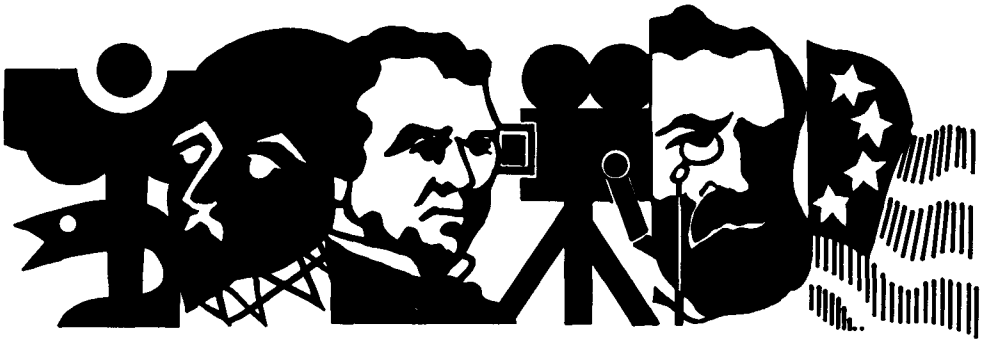

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of that claim are not pretty; the residents of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* are a sorry lot; and the folks in turn-of-the-century Black River Falls, Wisconsin—according to Michael Lesy in *Wisconsin Death Trip*—why, they were traveling full speed ahead on a hell-bound train. For these and other writers, the small-town closet is not full of family albums or clothes well-worn from honest work, but instead it contains skeletons that must be rattled. And rattled hard.

Because most assessments of small-town America tend toward the sweet or the sour, it's nice to have a book like Berton Roueché's *Special Places: In Search of Small Town America* that inhabits the middle ground. The seven essays in this collection were first published in *The New Yorker* as long ago as January 1971 and as recently as September 1981. They introduce us to: Stapleton, Nebraska; Welch, West Virginia; Hermann, Missouri; Crystal City, Texas; Corydon, Indiana; Pella, Iowa; and Hope, Arkansas. Students of geography will notice that Roueché's search for small-town America was not conducted on either coast; but *Special Places* manages, nonetheless, to transmit the tenor of small-town life as no other book I know.

One reason for Roueché's ability to convey so clearly what small towns are like is, simply, that he spent a fair amount of time in residence—a month usually. This enables him to get beneath the high-contrast surface matter to those deeper, grayer areas in which most of life is lived. He manages more often than not to find what is truly typical, to find the rhythm of a place, to replace generalizations and myths with things more substantial.

The first essay in *Special Places* is the oldest, and in many ways the best, essay in the collection. Its subject is Stapleton, Nebraska (population 303), the kind of tiny, middle-of-nowhere town that you drive through in seconds, and the sort of place from which characters in turn-of-the-century realistic novels fled to relieve near-terminal boredom. Roueché begins:

> Stapleton, where I lived for a month, the month of May, is a crossroads county seat in the Sand Hills country of western Nebraska. It was founded in 1912, and it has a population of three hundred and three. The Sand Hills are grassy dunes. They are great, oceanic waves of sand with a carpeting of the rich native grass that nourished the buffalo—sand bluestem, prairie sand reed, sand lovegrass, switch grass, needle and thread. . . . They cover all or much of twenty Nebraska counties. One of these, Cherry County, is bigger than Connecticut and Rhode Island combined. Logan County, of which Stapleton is the seat, is the smallest of the Sand Hills counties. It is roughly twice the size of Cape Cod. The Sand Hills grasslands are the quiddity of Stapleton. They surround and contain and sustain it. They also isolate it. Stapleton is the only town in Logan County.

Now that Roueché has constructed the frame, he sets to work on a picture of this town whose principal business, ranching, dictates isolation. We find that "practically everybody in Stapleton lives on the south side of town. . . . People like to have close neighbors." We learn that the women have a history of unusual names: "Melita, Alvirda, Glenola, Vernie Lynn, Tressa, Verla, Idara." We hear about the town's most prosperous citizen, Edwin H. Burnham, the banker, and his new house. Arthur French says Burnham is "building himself a new fifty-thousand-dollar home out east of town"; Charles V. Greenslit says it's "a sixty-thousand-dollar home"; and then Leslie M. Bay, the county judge, tells Roueché "I understand it's costing him in the neighborhood of seventy-five thousand dollars." Rumors, like weather forecasts, are a staple of small-town conversation, and equally accurate.

Roueché speaks with agricultural agents, ranchers, businessmen, waitresses, policemen; he reproduces conversations held at the café; and provides visual images of the town that, if translated into photographs, could fit into Robert Frank's *The Americans* with ease. Roueché visits the cemetery, tells us what it was like where he stayed, tells us that "almost everybody in Stapleton has blue eyes." The images accumulate, the picture fills out and is finally complete.

The other towns we meet in *Special Places* are larger than Stapleton, and all have some unusual features that make Roueché's task easier. A town like Hermann, Missouri, which is unremittingly German by preference and design (the trash cans, for example, are labeled "SCHUND," and the Missouri River at Hermann looks for all the world like the Rhine), is the sort of place where the usual is,

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in fact, unusual. Even so, Roueché's eyes and ears are so receptive, and his prose so lucid, that the familiar and obvious shimmer.

Roueché is a traveler. He tells us where he stays, and where he eats, and he loves to make lists. In the very Dutch town of Pella, Iowa, Roueché goes through the telephone book ("Kuyper, Vander Voort, Vermeer, Gaass, De Vries, Van Gorp . . ."); in Hope, Arkansas, he lists the brands of chewing tobacco that occupy four shelves at the local Safeway store ("Cannon Ball, Work Horse, Red Horse, Red Man, Beech-Nut, Conwood, Big Duke . . ."); and in Crystal City, Texas, he lists stores ("Winter Garden Auto Parts, R. S. Gonzales Western Wear, Commercial Refrigeration & Air Conditioning, the Guild Theater, and Arranaga's Shoppers World"). The lists are plentiful and, in their own way, wonderful.

Roueché usually works in a visit to the local cemetery, too, for he knows that people in small towns treat death with respect. In his profile of Hermann, Roueché writes:

> I started back down the slope to the street below, where I had left my car. It took me almost an hour to get there; I had forgotten the strange enchantment of an old cemetery. Death was taken seriously in America in the nineteenth century. Its presence was accepted and respected and, with their stylized conjurations of redemption, the placatory memorials it inspired are works of dignity and art.

The cemeteries in Hope and Stapleton also move Roueché, but he finds the cemetery in Pella disturbing—"It had the chill of an actuarial file"—and he flees from it.

Those who follow demographic trends know that the small town is in favor again, that during the last decade—for the first time since World War II—more people were going into than out of small towns. The towns in *Special Places* are, for the most part, growing towns: only a little of the you-can't-keep-'em-down-on-the-farm talk is heard, oddly enough, in towns that appear more or less saturated with progress.

While *Special Places* is a remarkably good book, it does not represent the full range of small-town America. (And how could it in 219 pages, seven towns?) Almost without exception, the subjects of Roueché's interviews

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are successful, comfortable—and sometimes smug—middle-class men and women who like small towns and paint a rosy picture of life there. *They're* doing fine. There is another side of the tracks, however, and there Roueché does not go; nor does he visit any small towns where the other-side-of-the-tracks style of life is dominant. This is not to suggest that Roueché should have been slumming, but only to observe that his small-town folks are a little too homogeneous. Then, too, there is the matter of geography—most of the towns depicted are located in America's midsection—although I suspect the differences among small towns in North Dakota and Vermont and Oregon would not be substantial but simply matters of regional inflection.

Such objections slide away in view of the quality of Roueché's writing and perceptions. The details he provides, the conversations he reproduces, the landscapes he sketches, the historical information he dredges up—all are so artfully interwoven as to deposit a reader in the town, be it Crystal City, Texas, or Welch, West Virginia. Roueché manages this without the (melo)dramatic framework of "You Are There," without glaring attention to the obvious, and with a grace that slips from the grasp of description. The Stage Manager in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* thought he'd "have a copy of this play put in the cornerstone and the people a thousand years from now'll know a few simple facts about us." I'd substitute *Special Places*; it's tied to the particular as well as the timeless.

Ethnic Secrets

HUNGER OF MEMORY: THE EDUCATION OF RICHARD RODRIGUEZ, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY. *By Richard Rodriguez. Godine. $13.95.*

Reviewed by HORACE A. PORTER

The "great luxury" of his life, Richard Rodriguez informs us at the beginning of his autobiography and first book, *Hunger of Memory*, "is the freedom to sit at this desk." That special freedom drives him to tell his life story in the manner that he chooses. So he emphasizes the fact that he writes of "one life only. My own." Although his parents are working-class Mexican immigrants, he scoffs at those who expect him to present a sentimental chronicle of his ethnic roots: "Aztec ruins hold no special interest for me. I do not search Mexican graveyards for ties to unnameable ancestors." Claiming Caliban as a more significant, if symbolic, relative, Rodriguez calls his autobiography "the history of my schooling." But the book is more comprehensive than this.

In a prologue and six chapters, Rodriguez discusses his bilingual childhood, his formal education, Catholicism, ethnicity, affirmative action, and his life as a young writer. He admits that his work is essentially a collection of essays (some were published in earlier and different versions—two in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR) "impersonating an autobiography." Nevertheless, from the prologue entitled "Middle-Class Pastoral" through "Mr. Secrets," the book's concluding chapter, Rodriguez gives an eloquent explanation of the pains, pleasures, and consequences of literacy. To be sure, his is by now a familiar American story: the second generation becomes estranged from the first via good fortune and good language. By focusing on language and literacy, Rodriguez provides an elegant variation on this theme.

In "Aria," the opening chapter of *Hunger of Memory*, he describes himself as a precocious, "listening child." He quickly learns to distinguish between "intimate" language (Spanish spoken at home by his parents and relatives) and "public" language (English spoken everywhere outside his home). He comprehends intuitively how a command of English will make a major difference in his life. One day, while an old nun reads to him, he also discovers something important about the mysterious power of words: "I sat there and sensed for the first time some possibility of fellowship between a reader and a writer, a communication; never *intimate* like that I heard spoken words at home convey, but one nonetheless personal." Indeed, he is precocious in many ways. In the fourth grade, for example, he embarks upon a "grandiose read-

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ing program." He reads *Great Expectations*, *The Babe Ruth Story*, the *Iliad*, *Moby-Dick*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Forever Amber*, *The Lives of the Saints*, *Crime and Punishment*, and other books. From the outset then, one learns that this autobiography is not only the painstaking description of the formation of a unique sensibility, but also the confessions of a bookworm.

As Rodriguez becomes proficient in English and grows more confident as a student, he begins to distance himself emotionally and psychologically from his parents' culture and language. Rodriguez dramatizes the psychological and emotional consequences of his literacy. From grade school through high school and his undergraduate years at Stanford, he not only describes the development of his literary skills, but he also shows how his education takes him further and further away from his Catholic, Spanish-speaking boyhood. Rodriguez's quest eventually leads him to Berkeley, where he specializes in the literature of the English Renaissance. During this period, he recognizes that he has become what Richard Hoggart calls the "scholarship boy." He describes his own predicament:

> The scholarship boy does not straddle, cannot reconcile, the two great opposing cultures of his life. . . . He sits in the seminar room—a man with brown skin, the son of working-class Mexican immigrant parents. . . . There is no trace of his parents' accent in his speech. . . . He lifts an opinion from Coleridge, takes something else from Frye or Empson or Leavis. . . . He seems to have no thoughts of his own.

In crucial ways, the child is the father of the man. Long before Rodriguez actually becomes the scholarship boy, the basic pattern and perhaps problem of his life is foreshadowed. Even while he is in elementary school, he is frequently embarrassed when his parents are forced to speak English. Thus, his "clutching trust in their protection and power weakened":

> There were many times like the night at a brightly lit gasoline station (a blaring white memory) when I stood uneasily hearing my father. He was talking to a teenaged attendant. I do not recall what they were saying, but I cannot forget the sounds my father made as he spoke. At one point his words slid

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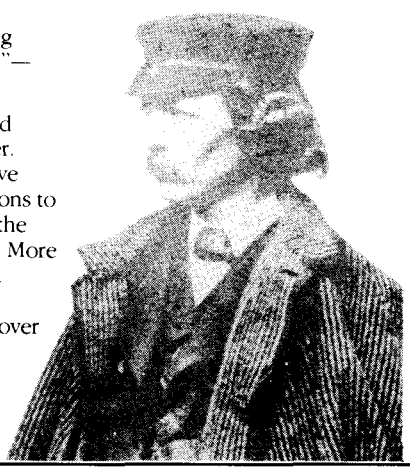

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together to form one word—sounds as confused as the threads of blue and green oil in the puddle next to my shoes. His voice rushed through what he had left to say. And, toward the end, reached falsetto notes, appealing to his listener's understanding. I looked away to the lights of passing automobiles. I tried not to hear anymore. But I heard only too well the calm, easy tone in the attendant's reply. Shortly afterward, walking home with my father, I shivered when he put his hand on my shoulder. The first chance I got, I evaded his grasp and ran on ahead in the dark.

This incident represents considerably more than momentary, childish rejection. It is a *tableau vivant* of a child saying no to his father's whole way of life.

The power of Rodriguez's autobiography lies partly in his ability to describe poignantly symbolic moments in his life. He provides the reader with a glorious series of such moments in "Credo," his third chapter, a sweet-scented evocation of his Catholic boyhood. He celebrates the traditional Catholic mass—the "heavy red missal" and Latin that would sometimes "induce an aimless drift inward." He describes how his services as an altar boy taught him much about the glory and the sorrow of the human condition. The lessons of the church are charming compared to those he learned as an immediate result of his skin color. "Complexion," the title of his fourth chapter, is a grim discourse on childhood self-hatred. He describes how and why the prevailing attitudes toward those with dark skin became an unfortunate part of his sense of self. He grows to detest his skin color. He frequently hears his aunts discussing their "pleasure at having light children" as well as their fear of having dark children. On occasion, he is the victim of random public abuse. Strangers shout racial slurs at him from passing cars. He associates dark skin with menial labor, since his mother often comments on the plight of black Americans. Moreover, his face, like the faces of numerous Mexican-American children born dark, is "treated regularly with a mixture of egg white and lemon juice concentrate." Of course, this ridiculous practice proves more humiliating than effective. So one day when Rodriguez is eleven or twelve, he takes the matter into his own hands:

I locked myself in the bathroom and carefully regarded my reflection in the mirror. . . . I began soaping my arms. I took my father's straight razor out of the medicine cabinet. . . . I put the blade against my flesh . . . and moved it up and down across my skin to see if I could get out, somehow lessen the dark.

Rodriguez is a courageous writer in *Hunger of Memory*. And his achievement is noteworthy. However, in "Profession," a complicated chapter devoted to his education at Stanford, Berkeley, and Columbia during the heyday of affirmative action programs, he becomes disappointing. Compared to the clear thought and the lucid prose throughout the book, "Profession" is oddly muddled. For one thing, he discusses his education almost exclusively in terms of affirmative action policy. While at Stanford and Berkeley, Rodriguez hates the label "minority student." He explains why by writing simultaneously a historical account of affirmative action and a chronicle of his struggle to resist the effects of that label, which became for him a racial slur.

But even when Rodriguez makes perceptive comments about affirmative action, he is terribly myopic. Take, for example, his primary argument in the chapter. He believes that civil rights activists made a tragic mistake in the 1960s when they "pressured universities and colleges to admit more black students and hire more black faculty" without considering the crucial factor of socioeconomic class. He writes:

The aim was to integrate higher education in the North. So no one seemed troubled by the fact that those who were in the best position to benefit from such reform were those blacks least victimized by racism or any other form of social oppression—those culturally, if not always economically, of the middle class.

Hindsight being a superior form of vision, Rodriguez wishes that the proponents of affirmative action had taken class, in addition to race, into account as they proposed various reforms. He argues that those black students who were finally admitted to northern colleges and universities were by and large the sons and daughters of middle-class blacks. This is a point that is well taken and one that is often forgotten. However, many of the academic institutions Rodriguez apparently has

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in mind—especially the exclusive private ones—had served traditionally as bastions of America's elite. It was customary to leave Andover and Exeter and to matriculate at Harvard or Yale.

But Rodriguez ignores more important historical facts in his assessment. First, even those blacks who were middle-class and "qualified" had been discriminated against for decades solely on the basis of race. This was the case for potential black students and faculty at the best and worst colleges and universities. Those blacks, for example, who somehow managed to get doctorates from the best universities were forced, with notable exceptions, to teach at black colleges. Furthermore, racism is a curious and illogical thing. Although some of the black students who were admitted during affirmative action's heyday might not have been socially oppressed or economically deprived, some were nevertheless victims of racism's poisonous effects.

Speaking as an outraged beneficiary of affirmative action policy, Rodriguez rehearses what is by now a popular form of banal criticism. What responsible American does not want what Rodriguez cries out for—"a reform of primary and secondary schools"? Like most writers on the subject, Rodriguez wants competent "nonwhite" (his adjective) students in our college and university classrooms. However, when Rodriguez explains how such students will be produced, he mouths the boring truisms of the liberal activists he is presumably criticizing:

> To improve the education of disadvantaged students requires social changes which educational institutions alone cannot make. . . . Parents of such students need jobs and good housing; the students themselves need to grow up with three meals a day, in safe neighborhoods. . . . In the late sixties, civil rights activists might have harnessed the great idealism that the southern movement inspired in Americans. They might have called on teachers, might have demanded some kind of national literacy campaign for children of the poor—white and nonwhite—at the earliest levels of learning.

But the opportunity passed. The guardians of institutional America in Washington were able to ignore the need for fundamental social changes. College and university administrators could proudly claim

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that their institutions had yielded, were open to minority groups.

The preceding is simply not commensurate with Richard Rodriguez's general level of reflection, which is so apparent elsewhere in *Hunger of Memory*. Which "guardians of institutional America in Washington" does Rodriguez have in mind—the Supreme Court, the United States Congress? Does he truly believe "college and university administrators" and their affirmative action programs prevented "fundamental social changes" from occurring in other areas of American life? Moreover, some of the very programs that Rodriguez calls for were actually initiated during the 1960s—breakfast for hungry preschoolers, free lunches for adolescents, alternative curricula, etc. Of course, some of these programs failed because greedy hustlers were allowed to manage them. But some of them presumably succeeded. Whatever the case, programs of the sort are now considered both useless and passé, the misguided excesses of do-gooder liberals and "big spenders." As far as a "national literacy campaign for children of the poor" is concerned, civil rights activists and strategists had something of the sort in mind when their long struggle led to the triumphant *Brown* v. *Board of Education* decision in 1954. Theirs was not called a "literacy campaign," but the proper education of the disadvantaged young was foremost in their minds. Rodriguez, for whatever reasons, either conveniently forgets or ignores these well-known facts of recent American history.

Now, the pros and cons of affirmative action have been argued tediously by a variety of experts and charlatans. It is common knowledge that affirmative action programs have not wrought miracles. No serious thinker ever thought that they would. But can Rodriguez honestly argue that a single decade or so of affirmative action policy has done more harm than numerous decades of racial discrimination—both legal and customary?

When Rodriguez considers his own role in the affirmative action scheme, he insists that unlike *los pobres*, working-class Mexican-Americans, he was never a "minority student." Although his parents are of the working class, he asserts: "I was not in a *cultural* sense a minority, an alien from public life. . . . The reason I was no longer a minority was because I had become a student." Yet, curiously, he tells us, he took full advantage of the opportunities affirmative action programs and policies afforded him. "The fact is," he writes, "I complied with affirmative action. I permitted myself to be prized. Even after publicly voicing objections to affirmative action, I accepted its benefits."

Perhaps this is primarily the source of Rodriguez's sumptuous guilt. And it is his guilt—his frustration and disappointment—that causes him to leave the academic world. At the end of his graduate school career, he is sought after by numerous English departments while his white colleagues (who are not nearly as fortunate or favored) stare at him with disbelief. When the department of English at Yale offers him a job, he feels that matters have gotten out of hand. So he says no to Yale and all of the other colleges and universities. He telephones his parents and informs them of his odd decision. They are stunned. His mother, he says,

> did not seem to hear exactly what I was trying to tell her. She let the subject pass without comment. . . . My father, however, clearly understood. Silent for a moment, he seemed uncertain of what I expected to hear. Finally, troubled, he said hesitantly, "I don't know why you feel this way. We have never had any of the chances before."

Rodriguez's conclusion reads: "*We*, he said. But he was wrong. It was *he* who had never had any chance before."

Because I am a black American and was a "scholarship boy," much of what Richard Rodriguez says is terribly familiar to me. However, I do not share Rodriguez's guilt over what proved for me, unlike the situation of four generations of my forebears, to be propitious historical circumstances. Why should I? I have spent enough hours in the library and at the typewriter to know that affirmative action does not a writer and scholar make. Furthermore, having tried a few years ago to articulate publicly some of what he poignantly explains, I possess a firsthand knowledge of the possible pitfalls of writing about being a scholarship boy and a minority student. Chief among them is the problem of moral and emotional evasion.

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Of course, when anyone tells his or her life story, distortion is inevitable; autobiography is by definition the art of self-vindication. But some autobiographers turn certain narrative corners much faster than others. Rodriguez is occasionally a victim of this problematic practice. So an odd form of disingenuousness seeps through the pages of his book. Perhaps genuine confusion leads to some of his moments of evasion. But his studied stance as a dispassionate observer renders him incapable of confronting and sorting out his complex emotional responses during certain significant moments. His description of his telephone conversation with his parents after he rejects the job at Yale is one such telling example. Why does Rodriguez settle for a quick sociological formulation to sum up the matter ("It was *he* who had never had any chance before")? What, one wonders, would have been his reply had his father asked him the following questions: Are you not being foolishly ahistorical in your assessment of who you are? Do you recall that I still own a copy of your birth certificate?

Even when Rodriguez assumes a posture of contrition, one wonders precisely who and what he has in mind:

> You who read this act of contrition should know that by writing it I seek a kind of forgiveness—not yours. The forgiveness, rather, of those many persons whose absence from higher education permitted me to be classed a minority student.

Where does his charity and contrition begin and end? Does Richard Rodriguez also seek the "forgiveness" of his parents? Perhaps his dramatic insistence upon the difference and distance between his culture and complex fate and the world of his father tells us more about him than his assertions. Despite his disclaimers, the "forgiveness" he seeks has as much to do with his identification with his forebears, even those distant dead ones who rest unvisited in Mexican graveyards, than to the anonymous disadvantaged. Rodriguez does not thoroughly confront this matter in *Hunger of Memory*. He refuses to acknowledge the fact that his father's comment ("We have never had any of the chances before") goes to the heart of a profound American issue, the unfulfilled promise of democracy.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

The Foundations of Critical Pluralism, an interdisciplinary conference on all aspects of critical pluralism, will be held March 22–24, 1984.

Two papers may be chosen from submitted manuscripts. Submissions from younger, as well as established scholars, are invited. Selected conference papers will be published in a volume to be sponsored by *Critical Inquiry*, co-sponsor of the conference.

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His father's comment reveals an abiding faith in our national experiment, our trial-and-error program in democratic living. Hence Rodriguez, the scholarship boy turned writer, is still facing the arduous task of being an American. Specifically, he is still striving to reconcile the "two great opposing cultures of his life." So he is intimidated by his father's comment, which also dramatizes a belief in the human family (starting appropriately with one's own) and those ancient, fundamental human customs that, to use Conrad's words, "bind together all humanity—the dead to the living and the living to the unborn." Thus, the dynamic tension between the world of the father and that of the son is the source of what Rodriguez calls the "sad, fuguelike repetition" in *Hunger of Memory*. His autobiography is essentially a passacaglia of guilt and nostalgia.

One is not sure whether Richard Rodriguez's guilt is either assuaged or intensified by his achievement and success. Of course, if we take him at his word, he is currently delighted with the grandeur of his person and social status. He adores his complexion. Tanned and toned from miles spent jogging in the California sun, he has become "the dandy." He wears "double-breasted Italian suits and custom-made English shoes." When a registration clerk in a London hotel observes his face and assumes that he is returning from Switzerland, Rodriguez concludes that his complexion has become a mark of "leisure." He states: "Yet no one would regard my complexion the same way if I entered such hotels through the service entrance. That is to say that my complexion assumes its significance from the context of my life. My skin, in itself, means nothing." Here Rodriguez writes as though he already belongs to a timeless higher community of literati, writers who are immune to human prejudice. Of course, he is not. His conclusion is yet another one of his facile evasions. This complex issue deserves lengthy and careful reflection. Would Rodriguez draw the same conclusion if he were not afforded ethnic ambiguity by his complexion? What would Rodriguez say about this matter of color if he were black? It would be ridiculous to say that education and high social status mean nothing. But Rodriguez's comment is utterly superficial. Surely he knows

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that in, say, Europe, let alone America, the dark prince is often mistaken for the pauper.

In his concluding chapter, "Mr. Secrets," a name Rodriguez's mother now calls him, he describes the lonely and anguish-filled road to articulate autobiographical prose. He thinks of his parents' potential response to the book he is writing:

> Many mornings at my desk I have been paralyzed by the thought of their faces, their eyes. I imagine their eyes moving slowly across the pages. That image has weakened my resolve. . . . But unlike my parents, I have come to think that there is a place for the deeply personal in public life. This is what I have learned by trying to write this book: There are things so deeply personal that they can be revealed only to strangers. I believe this. I continue to write.

The foregoing passage is characteristic of Rodriguez's moving, poetic conclusion. However, given Rodriguez's spectacular metamorphosis, his newfound identity as a cosmopolitan man of letters, one wonders how he will carry his heavy cultural baggage as he climbs Mount Olympus. In fact, one is left wondering at the book's end about the nature of his literary ambition. What kind of writer does he intend to become? Will he continue to pursue success as a public spokesman on controversial issues? *Hunger of Memory* alone has brought him considerable public acclaim. The book was reviewed and praised on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review*. And Rodriguez has been featured in *People* magazine and interviewed on CBS's "Sunday Morning." If Rodriguez continues his career as a public spokesman, for whom and what will he speak? As the number of Hispanic Americans in the United States increases, will he ironically become one of their major spokesmen? Rodriguez does not offer answers to such questions in *Hunger of Memory*.

Whatever becomes of Rodriguez as a writer and as a man, *Hunger of Memory*, despite its shortcomings, is a remarkable autobiography in which a talented writer summons bitter and sweet memories to intelligence. The style and point of view of this book are very special. But one is left with the feeling that, over the years, the question of Rodriguez's relationship to his parents and his past will return, like Banquo's ghost, to haunt him.

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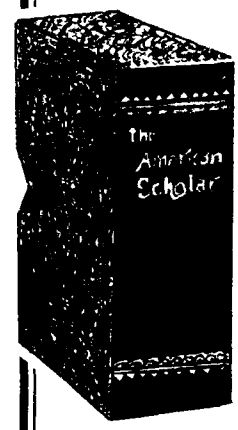

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The Reader Replies

Holmes's *Common Law:* A Centennial View

Given the possibility that Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes's niche in the American pantheon may be somewhat higher than his accomplishments merit, Saul Touster has a case in his article in the Autumn 1982 SCHOLAR. Because of ambiguities and conflicts in his assertions, Touster falls short of making it.

Thus we are variously informed that *The Common Law*, never quite received as a masterpiece, became nevertheless a legal bible; that the book's unacknowledged failure is clear (to whom?); that Maitland is insightful when he recognizes in the blood feud (itself, in the author's view, conciliatory) a source of common law, while Holmes's finding of a similar influence in the vengeance that motivates the feud is simpleminded.

Holmes's derision of talk of justice ("humbug") could well be a mark of candor and of the sense of proportion that shuns pretension. More examples of what he did on the bench, rather than what he said away from it, would have provided better grounds for assessing his sense of justice—and by the legal standards then current, rather than by ours today.

Since few specifics precede Touster's closing question ("At what cost to the law has his influence been felt these hundred years?"), it cannot question either the effects of that influence or the sagacity of those who accepted its guidance. It does, however, suggest a response. The regime of law characterized by separate but equal, a blank check for sovereign immunity, routine injunctive relief for corporations, is today regarded as antediluvian, and rightly so. During these hundred years, the ranks of the legally disadvantaged have been reduced. Justice has become more democratized (paralleling and no doubt facilitating a similar diffusion of affluence). Touster acknowledges Holmes as a contributor to this development.

RICHARD LIETO
Point Pleasant, New Jersey

SAUL TOUSTER replies: The format of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR does not encourage the usual scholarly documentation. If Mr. Lieto and other readers desire a "few specifics" supporting my views of Holmes, I would refer them to a substantially expanded and documented version of my article, published in *Hofstra Law Review*, Spring 1982, Vol. 10, No. 3. More "specifics" can be found in another article in that review by Professor Robert W. Gordon. The earlier excellent work on Holmes that I refer to, by the late Yosal Rogat, can be found in *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 15 (1962–63) and *University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (1964). In the latter, there are also several other appraisals of the Holmes of *The Common Law* which, in their balance, leave behind the tone of canonization.

As for the "antediluvian" character of nineteenth-century law, we ought to remember where Holmes stood in the three areas Mr. Lieto mentions:

1) As to "separate but equal," Holmes in his theory and on the bench not only made no inroad on this pernicious doctrine, but his work *supports* it: namely, his notions of banishing morals from the law and of the right of the majority to have its way on social and economic matters, unlimited by the Fourteenth Amendment. These and his Darwinian views led him in *many* important decisions to the reactionary side of efforts to change the racist legal doctrines then prevalent (for instance, on school segregation, *Berea College* v. *Kentucky*, 211 U.S. 45 (1908); on peonage, *Bailey* v. *Alabama*, 211 U.S. 452 (1908) and 219 U.S. 219 (1911); on protecting Negro voting rights, *Giles* v. *Harris*, 189 U.S. 475 (1903)).

2) As to "sovereign immunity," Holmes in his theories and on the bench must be considered if not the father then the most stalwart son of the most extreme positivist view of the unconstrained powers of the sovereign (see Rogat's work, which documents this).

3) I assume what is meant by "routine injunctive relief for corporations" is the bias of the courts in favor of private enterprise and against labor in its organizing efforts. Yes, in this area, Holmes was decidedly a positive influence both on the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts and the U.S. Supreme Court.

Holmes was known as a skeptic and would, pre-

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sumably, welcome a little skepticism applied to himself. In this my efforts were preceded, by many years, by that of the great skeptic, H. L. Mencken, who shook his head in disbelief at the claims that Holmes was a democratic spirit interested in the rights of man. On the contrary, says Mencken, "if I do not misread his plain words, he was no more than an advocate of the rights of law-makers. . . . He believed that the law-making bodies should be free to experiment almost *ad libitum*, that the courts should not call a halt upon them until they clearly passed the uttermost bounds of reason, that everything should be sacrificed to their autonomy, including, apparently, even the Bill of Rights." (*A Mencken Chrestomathy*, 1949, reprinted from *The American Mercury*, May 1930 and May 1932).

Breakup: A Memoir

The letters column of the Autumn 1982 SCHOLAR corrects one error and commits another. Yes, Lionel Abel, in his article "Breakup: A Memoir" (Summer 1982), had the date of the "Pasternak affair" wrong (it should have been 1958), but no, Dwight Macdonald did not write *The Root Is Man* shortly thereafter, but a dozen years earlier.

And what about the much more serious distortions and inaccuracies in Abel's memoir, which accuse the dead of evil motives and bad faith? The truth can be known, simply by comparing what Abel claims was said at the Pasternak meeting with what the victims of his bad memory, Harold Rosenberg and Paul Goodman, actually said in a magazine symposium not long after the event itself:

What Abel Claims: "When the first suggestion was put forward that we draft a letter of protest to the Soviet government, Paul indicated that he would sign no such letter. . . . Coming from us, such a protest would be in bad faith, for we had not protested the refusal of a moving-picture house in Hicksville, Long Island, to show a recent Charlie Chaplin film that made fun of American anti-communism. . . . On this particular evening Rosenberg said little—which was most unusual—and made no really signal contribution to the chaos of our meeting. . . . Paul once again asserted his unwillingness to sign any statement that implied any approval of the policy of our government, most especially its policy on literary questions. Any attack on Soviet policy, he said, was an endorsement of that of its opposite number. . . . What Paul had in fact said was that he did not want to defend Pasternak and that he would not criticize the Soviet government. . . . When it was finally apparent that no statement would be agreed upon, the meeting broke up. It had been suggested that Harold Rosenberg write a provisional statement. . . . Harold Rosenberg wrote no statement."

What Rosenberg said in 1960: "To take a stand in favor of freedom for Pasternak and against the USSR was all too easy—one had simply to go along with Mr. Dulles' denouncing the absence of free expression under Communism. . . . But writers who had learned to take action seriously saw no point in casting their mite into the vat of the Cold War. . . . Four or five writers of the Left, long-time anti-Stalinists but abstainers from the fashionable anti-Communism of a few years ago, attempted to draw up a statement that would point past the Cold War lineup to the actual drama of the creation and suppression of *Doctor Zhivago*. They soon discovered that true concern about an issue, as distinguished from raising one's hand and answering 'present,' could be as inhibiting as inadequate concern. To formulate a statement upon which all would agree proved to be immeasurably difficult."

What Goodman said in 1960: "At the height of the Pasternak business, the usual gang of us held a meeting. I there insisted that any attempt to treat it in isolation was effectually a coldwar maneuver: I proposed (and had so written the papers in a letter they did not print) that the censorship of Pasternak, the recent suppression of the *Dublin An Tostal* because of the hatred of O'Casey by the Catholic hierarchy, and the suppression of some early Chaplin slapstick by the village of Hicksville should be treated as equally significant and blameworthy. This proposal managed to sabotage the meeting."

One assumes that Abel knew of these statements by Rosenberg and Goodman, for he himself contributed to that symposium in the winter 1960 issue of *Anvil*, and his own version of the story *then* also contradicts his version *now:*

What Abel said in 1960: "A committee was formed to draw up a statement and a document was finally produced which was very compromised—it reflected the many differences among the members of the committee. When a meeting was called of some two dozen writers, it became clear that agreement could never be reached on what should be said, or what should be stressed in what was said. As a result, the final statement was not worth sending out for signatures."

So much for memory. As for motive, Abel claims that Goodman, as early as 1958, "was aware at that time that either a consistently anti-Communist or—what was almost the same—a pro-American-government attitude would prevent any writer from being taken up by the young." What crystal-ball gazing! Goodman is supposed to have taken his position to please the youth movement of a half-dozen years later.

Abel's own values are apparent in his accusation; I need not speak of them. The final scene, Abel misreading Goodman's hail for a shaking fist, and hastily slamming the cab door on him, is a perfect cameo of his reconstruction of the entire affair:

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seeing what he wants to see, remembering what he wants to remember, then off in the taxi!

TAYLOR STOEHR
Cambridge, Massachusetts

MR. ABEL replies: Mr. Taylor Stoehr accuses me of bad memory and of distortion and inaccuracy in my description of a meeting at which he himself was not present; he further charges me with ascribing evil motives and bad faith to Harold Rosenberg and Paul Goodman, who are dead and cannot defend themselves. Now these are serious charges. One may ask, though: were they seriously made? The only evidence Mr. Stoehr has adduced supports, and in no way contradicts, my account of the meeting.

Nevertheless, I want to respond to his charges point by point.

1. *My "bad memory":* The evidence here is that I gave an incorrect date for the Pasternak meeting, which took place in 1958 and not in 1955. I have already admitted the error in a letter to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. Still, I am not going to concede that my *memory* is bad. It is, of course, not infallible; neither is Mr. Stoehr's. But one can rarely distinguish *in memory* a single year long locked in the past from the years that directly preceded or succeeded it. I think President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, but I am not sure enough to assert that such was the date without checking in some relevant document. In dating the Pasternak meeting, my research evidently was faulty. The meeting itself I remember quite well.

2. *My "distortions and inaccuracies":* This is a most remarkable charge from one who was not present at the meeting and is not supported, to my knowledge, by anyone who was there. Moreover, Mr. Stoehr has not cited anything that took place at the meeting that I failed to describe or shown that anything I said happened did not.

3. *My ascription of "evil motives" and "bad faith" to Harold Rosenberg and Paul Goodman:* This charge is simply absurd, and suggests to me that Mr. Stoehr reads as badly as he writes. All I said of Harold Rosenberg's behavior at the meeting was that he "... made no really signal contribution to the chaos of our meeting." Can this be read as an accusation of bad motives or bad faith? It has, of course, been so read by Mr. Stoehr, but is anyone else in the world going to agree with him? I also noted that Harold did not draw up a protest statement. But this was in no sense a criticism of him. How could he have drawn up a statement to represent a group whose members could not agree on the matter at issue? Mr. Stoehr himself quotes Harold's remark (made in 1960): "To formulate a statement upon which all would agree proved to be immeasurably difficult." It strikes me that Mr. Stoehr cannot even read the texts he cites.

And I must make the same point about what he claims I said against Paul Goodman. I did indeed show how Paul sabotaged our meeting. But here are Paul's own words on the matter, cited by Mr. Stoehr: "I proposed ... that the censorship of Pasternak ... and the suppression of some early Chaplin slapstick by the village of Hicksville should be treated as equally significant and blameworthy. This proposal managed to sabotage the meeting."

One last point. Mr. Stoehr objects to my guess that Paul Goodman had a certain *intuition* of what the youth of the sixties would demand of anyone who was to lead them politically. I submit that one has to be dazed—maybe crazed—by ideological hatred to see any insult to Paul. All I said was that he had some intuition of what was to come.

I am sorry to have taken up THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR's valuable space. But even nonsense, when ill-intentioned, has to be answered.

History in an Age of Ideologies

Odd how ahistorical a historian can become when he wants to claim eternal validity for his favorite idea of history. Arnaldo Momigliano writes ("History in an Age of Ideologies," Autumn 1982): "What I ultimately want to suggest is that history must remain, even in times of mass education, what it was when it was written for a limited number of adult readers—namely, information about our past." Could Professor Momigliano perhaps tell us what the equivalent Greek and Latin words are for our "information"?

JAMES BENNETT
Chicago, Illinois

ARNALDO MOMIGLIANO replies: Mr. Bennett need not go beyond Thucydides Book I Chapter I to find the notion of information as central to this author. The Greek text is correctly rendered by the Loeb translator: "it was impossible to get clear information on account of lapse of time." The real question is what the Greek and Roman historians meant by information about the past. This I have tried to explain in pages of my paper Mr. Bennett does not seem to have read.

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